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## PERSECUTION AND TOLERANCE

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# PERSECUTION

AND

# TOLERANCE

*BEING THE HULSEAN LECTURES*

PREACHED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

IN 1893-4

BY

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EMMANUEL



## PREFACE

No one can feel more strongly than myself the triviality of this book as a contribution to the investigation of a large subject. It is only published in the hope that it may inspire some one to enter upon that subject with the thoroughness that it deserves. I have merely put together some conclusions which, in the course of my reading, came before my mind. They are fragmentary and incomplete; but I found that any serious attempt at expansion would entirely alter the form of the book. All that I have done, in preparing them for the press, is to divide the second lecture into two parts for greater clearness, and to expand the first portion of it. I have also put into the Introduction the substance of recapitulations which were necessary to

carry on the argument after intervals. In this revision I have been greatly helped by the Rev. J. O. F. Murray, Fellow of Emmanuel College.

M. PETRIBURG.

THE PALACE, PETERBOROUGH,  
*9th January, 1895.*

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## INTRODUCTION.

THE existence of persecution in the Christian Church is a fact which is more frequently commented on than explained. Greater attention has been paid to the methods and extent of persecution than to the causes which produced it, or the causes which brought it to an end.

It is indeed difficult to approach the subject in an impartial spirit. Those who write the history of any period of persecution tend either to exaggerate or to apologise. On the one side, there is a desire to represent persecution as especially inherent in all religious systems, or it may be, as especially inherent in Christianity. On the other side, there is a tendency to plead the generally beneficent action of a particular form of religious organisation in relation to the world's progress as an extenuation of its particular misdoings.

The history of persecution is a large subject, and requires accurate discrimination of its 'separ-

ate phases. The meaning of tolerance, its basis, and the causes which produced it, form a necessary complement to any such inquiry. On so wide a field it is presumptuous to enter without complete equipment. Yet I feel that it may be possible to turn attention to some aspects of the question which have been overlooked; and I am not without hopes that even a few fragmentary thoughts may perhaps awaken an interest in the mind of some one who may be enabled to pursue the subject more systematically. It seemed to me that, sometimes at least, the object of the founder of this lecture might be fulfilled by propounding a large question, rather than by working out some point of detail.

It may be well, for the sake of clearness, to state at once the main conclusions which I have endeavoured to set forth in the following pages. These are (1) that persecution, or the infliction of punishment for erroneous opinions, was contrary to the express teaching of Christ, and was alien to the spirit of Christianity; (2) was adopted by the Church from the system of the world, when the Church accepted the responsibility of maintaining order in the community; (3) was really

exercised for political rather than religious ends ; (4) was always condemned by the Christian conscience ; (5) was felt by those who used it to land them in contradictions ; (6) neither originated in any misunderstanding of the Scriptures nor was removed by the progress of intellectual enlightenment, but (7) disappeared because the State became conscious that there was an adequate basis for the maintenance of political society in those principles of right and wrong which were universally recognised by its citizens, apart from their position or beliefs as members of any religious organisation.

Such opinions differ materially from those which are generally current on this subject. The origin of persecution is commonly found in the overwhelming claim which Christianity makes on its adherents. Christianity, it is said, regards man's life on earth as but the beginning of an eternal destiny, and asserts that eternity can only bring happiness to those who are within the fold of the Church. Consequently the maintenance of right opinion about religious matters is a point of primary importance for human happiness, rightly understood, and ought

in the interests of mankind to be enforced even at the cost of immediate suffering to obdurate and misguided individuals.<sup>1</sup> This is doubtless a logical position and is warranted by the language of the advocates of persecution. But a line of distinction must be drawn between the motives which prompted to persecution, and the arguments by which it was defended, when once it was undertaken. It is obvious that this reasoning was the only one by which persecution could be defended, and it is equally obvious that persecution needed a defence.

But persecution was never upheld as being a method of general application; it was always described as a surgical operation, as cutting out plague spots that the health of the body politic might be preserved. Its object was not the salvation of the greatest number, in spite of themselves, but the protection of the purity of the Church, on the basis which it had laid down for itself. In fact persecution was directed against heretics and schismatics rather than against unbelievers.

<sup>1</sup> This is briefly the position taken up by Mr. Lecky, *History of Rationalism*, chap. iv., which is probably the best statement of the current view of the subject.



Now if the motive of persecution had been the overpowering sense of exclusive salvation through the Church, the whole history of Christianity would have been different. In the first place, it would have been bound to spread its dominion by the sword; and this it did not attempt to do. Its missionary enterprise was great; but even the ideal motive of the crusades was not the forcible conversion of the Mussulman, but the recovery of an heirloom of Christendom. Moreover, even within the limits of Christendom itself, coercion was not employed against those who were not Christians. Let me quote the words of one who believes that persecution arose from mistaken zeal, but recognises facts that make against his view:—

“Man is seldom wholly consistent in the practical application of his principles, and the persecutors of the thirteenth century made one concession to humanity and common-sense which was fatal to the completeness of the theory on which they acted. To carry it out fully they should have proselytised with the sword among all non-Christians whom fate threw in their power; but from this they abstained. Infidels who had

never received the faith, such as Jews and Saracens, were not to be compelled to Christianity. Even their children were not to be baptised without parental consent, as this would be contrary to natural justice, as well as dangerous to the purity of the faith. It was necessary that the misbeliever should have been united to the Church by baptism in order to give her jurisdiction over him.”<sup>1</sup>

There is no inconsistency in these opinions, which are quoted from the writings of St. Thomas, if we recognise that persecution was used for the maintenance of the organisation of the Church; and that the opinions of the heretics, against whom persecution was directed, were regarded by the State as endangering social order. Jews and Saracens were not citizens, but aliens who might be expelled at any moment. Their existence within the limits of Christendom constituted no menace to the framework of civil society.

Moreover, this theory of the basis of persecution assumes that persecution had its origin purely in the Christian belief. But this was not so. The

<sup>1</sup> H. C. Lea, *History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, i., 242.

ancient conception of the State as a community for the purpose of civilised life accepted man as he was, recognised the operative motives of conduct, and tried to bring them under State control. It was a matter of political expediency that men should at least profess to hold the same religious opinions. The language of Plato did not materially differ from that of the Inquisitor: "Let this then be the law: No one shall possess shrines of the Gods in private houses, and he who is found to possess them, and perform any sacred rites not publicly authorised, shall be informed against to the guardians of the law; and let them issue orders that he shall carry his private rites to the public temples, and if he do not obey, let them inflict a penalty until he comply. And if a person be proven guilty of impiety, not merely from childish levity, but such as grown-up men may be guilty of, let him be punished with death."<sup>1</sup>

These were the matured principles of Plato, after he had seen them applied in some degree to the case of Socrates. Yet Plato had no belief in exclusive salvation, but was concerned only with

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Laws*, 908-10; Jowett's translation.

the problem of a well-ordered State. I need not recall the existence of similar principles in the Roman Empire. Roman religion was willing to make a place for every cult which could be trusted not to outstep the bounds of political convenience: but it had its *illicitae religiones*, and Christianity was one of them. Roman civilisation fell, because the old motives for patriotism, public spirit, duty, and helpfulness were worn out, and could not be renewed from any elements which the State had at its command. It was conquered by Christianity, because Christianity had a new power of binding men together. Then came the temptation to the Christian Church to permit the State to make this power the outward framework, as well as the inner principle, of social life.

I am concerned only with persecution in its ecclesiastical aspect. But the considerations which I have just put forward, lead into a larger field. Persecution is supposed to be an iniquity peculiar to ecclesiastical institutions. I have not striven, in the following pages, to extenuate the evil doings of Church or Churchmen; they must bear the responsibility of allowing the struggle for liberty of

opinion to be fought on religious grounds. But the struggle in itself was inevitable. Those responsible for the maintenance of any form of social order, think it wise to prevent new opinions from finding premature expression. They seek to keep them within harmless limits, and constitute themselves judges of what is harmful. The conscious and deliberate expression of man's attitude towards the great issues of life will always awaken discord. Political sagacity is always employed in preventing the possibility of a revolution. There would have been suppression of opinion, if there had been no Christian Church. But this does not lessen the responsibility of the Church, which set up Inquisitors in aid of the civic police.

I have spoken so fully of the evils of persecution, that I may be allowed to dwell for a moment on some faint gleams of compensation. If we attempt a general survey of political progress, it may be said that persecution is concerned with that period of social development in which the individual made good his right to form his own opinions; but he made it good by proving that a great diversity of opinions was compatible with the existence of social order. It must be remem-

bered that this was a discovery to be made, a truth to be proved. States and individuals alike needed training before it could be accepted. From the point of view of the Church, it is absolutely indefensible that she should have allowed the conflict to be waged round her teaching or her organisation. But the battle on such a ground was at least fruitful of results; and the cry of liberty of conscience raised the issue in its noblest form. The combatant, or the sufferer, for such an object knew the responsibility attaching to freedom; and the struggle brought to light great principles of common life, which had to be recognised before the fight was won. Dreadful as are the records of wars of religion, it must be admitted that these wars had causes which were entirely independent of religion, and corresponded to national aspirations, which found expression in religious differences, but were not religious in their real origin. In fact religion is almost the necessary covering for principles; and war must be waged in behalf of a principle, if it is not waged merely for greed. Parties formed for the maintenance of a principle rest after all on a nobler basis than do shifting combinations for

material ends. The wars of the fifteenth century, when princes and people, emancipated from all religious and moral considerations, pursued an ever-changing policy of personal, or national, aggrandisement, were not so fruitful for the future as were the religious wars of the sixteenth century. "Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum" is an old exclamation, which has oftentimes been repeated. But there are evils in the world even where there is no religion. Any form of religion implies some limitation on arbitrary caprice. It must always be remembered, in surveying the past, that the contrast is not between oppression, in the particular form which it took, and freedom; but between one form of oppression and another. Mediæval England was singularly free from religious persecution, but it was not free from injustice. Persecution only began in England when new forces in society made themselves felt; and religious differences, in this country, have always been closely connected with social distinctions.

But these are considerations which lead beyond my immediate subject, which is, to maintain that Christianity cannot justly be charged

with persecution. It arose from impulses of human nature, common at all times, which Christianity did not immediately succeed in subduing, and which succeeded for a time in cloaking themselves with the semblance of doing God service by promoting the common welfare. The spirit of Christianity never ceased to protest, and finally supplied the force before which persecution fell.

Though persecution, as expressed in legal penalties, may be a thing of the past, the temper which produced it may still survive in altered forms. The desire to have one's own way, because it is one's own, may still wear the appearance of zeal for the common good, or care for the purity of an institution. Penalties may still be inflicted after trial with closed doors. Discussion may be prematurely checked by means as efficacious as the threat of the faggot and the stake. In surveying the mistakes of the past, it is well to remember that their causes are not removed.



## I.

### THE PERSECUTING SPIRIT.

“When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt Thou that we bid fire to come down from heaven and consume them? But He turned and rebuked them. And they went to another village.” (St. Luke ix. 54-6)—*Revised Version.*

SUCH is the account of this remarkable incident in the simple form to which it has been reduced by recent criticism of the sacred text. It is better known to us in the more elaborate form in which it has been current in the Church, probably since the end of the second century.<sup>1</sup> The fact that this passage was selected as needing expansion and explanation is in itself significant of the importance which was in very early times attached

<sup>1</sup> “When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But He turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.” (St. Luke ix. 54-6)—*A.V.*

to it. "He turned and rebuked them;" though the evangelist did not record the nature of the rebuke, it may well be that tradition treasured the weighty words, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of," and they were added to the original. A further expansion was given by the adaptation of recorded utterances of Jesus: "For the Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them."<sup>1</sup> In the same way the cause of the apostles' zeal was at a later period rendered more obvious and intelligible by the explanatory reference to the prophet of the Old Dispensation, whom they had just seen on the Mount of Transfiguration; and the words, "as Elijah did," made explicit what was before implied in the question: "Wilt Thou that we bid fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"<sup>2</sup> In this way, it would seem, the original narrative of St. Luke was enriched by a careful commentary, calculated to impress its meaning more forcibly on the mind, and leave no room for misunderstanding.

I have dwelt upon the history of the text,

<sup>1</sup> St. John iii. 17; St. Luke xix. 10.

<sup>2</sup> For the history of the text see Westcott & Hort, *New Testament*, Appendix, 59-60.

because it seems to indicate a progressive anxiety to grasp and explain the purport of the incident here recorded. A suggestion was made to the Lord that He should use His supernatural power for the purpose of punishing those who refused to receive Him. He not only repudiated the suggestion, but rebuked the spirit from which it sprang, as being alien to the method of His teaching and repugnant to the spirit of His mission.

\* Such an incident, emphasised in such a way, was admirably fitted to guide His Church in all ages. A great principle could not have been expressed more clearly, or in a form better calculated to arrest attention. Not only was persecution itself condemned, but also the temper from which it sprang, and the arguments by which it was supported. Yet in spite of all this, the history of the Christian Church shows us that this solemn warning failed of its purpose, so much so that the spirit of Christianity is sometimes represented as essentially a persecuting spirit.

In early days the Christian consciousness went out of its way to make clear the proclamation of its Master that the kingdom of heaven was to

spread from within, and was to find its home in the hearts and consciences of ransomed and regenerate men. In latter days a dominant organisation caught at every argument which could enable it to hold men subject to its sway, and welcomed compulsion as an aid to its efforts. We may well ask ourselves how such a change was wrought.

For the purpose of answering this question let us return to the incident recorded in the text, and consider it as an illustration of the motives which prompt to persecution, and their relation to the arguments to which they turn for support.

Jesus was churlishly refused hospitality in a village of the Samaritans because His face was set to go to Jerusalem. The refusal was an outrage, and an insult: an outrage to the great Teacher, who at least deserved respect; an insult to the national sentiment of His followers. It came at a time when the hearts of the apostles had been uplifted by the splendid vision of the Mount of Transfiguration. The great lawgiver, and the foremost prophet of the law, had submitted themselves to Jesus and acknowledged that He was sent to accomplish and perfect their

mission. For a moment the kingdom of heaven had seemed to have a local habitation upon earth. Never before had those who saw that vision been so deeply impressed with a sense of their Master's greatness. It is true that He had spoken of impending disaster, but this counted for little; so far as the hearers attended to His forebodings they were only an incitement to their zeal. Dangers—yes, there were dangers; but surely they could be overcome by One whose power was so far-reaching and so deeply seated. Courage and resoluteness were the qualities necessary for success. So the affront to their Master and to their nation seemed doubly intolerable. Why possess power and not use it? Why have a policy and not give it effect? The sense of power, the consciousness of a noble and far-reaching policy, created in their minds a desire for strong and vigorous action; and action involved the overthrow of gainsayers. Is not this natural reasoning? Does it not apply to the conduct of great affairs? Does it not express the necessary method of success?

But there was more than a desire for action in the minds of the energetic apostles. Con-

siderations of policy might enable them to explain their action to themselves and give it a fair colour; but the motive was one of human impatience, irritation and desire for revenge. Their sense of right and wrong was shocked by the insult offered them by the Samaritans. Doubtless it seemed to them that they were free from selfish feeling; for they were moved only in behalf of their Master, and of their nation. But their Master's cause was after all their own. They had left all and followed Him; but if they were prepared to share His hardships at first, it was partly in the hope that one day they might share His glory. When He was welcomed with respect, some reflection of the honour paid to Him fell upon themselves. They felt resting upon them the blessing of Moses and Elijah; was not that to be realised by some form of human recognition, which should brighten their path through life? When they were brought into sudden contact with human churlishness they experienced a sense of personal wrong, of deprivation of an undoubted right. The extent of this personal feeling was hidden from them by the fact that it was concealed beneath the veil of a further insult

to their nation. The Samaritan villagers expressed their immemorial hatred for the Jews by refusing to admit to hospitality one who was journeying towards the Holy City. Personal resentment cloaked itself behind the cover of patriotic zeal for the national honour. Surely "salvation was of the Jews": should not that truth be placed beyond dispute? Nothing is better for the world's progress than to make its great issues clear. A nation conscious of a mission must assert its right to fulfil its mission. A timely resort to force is the shortest and most humane method in the long run. A signal act of vengeance on a handful of insolent peasants would be a warning to the rest, and would doubtless lead to the submission of the whole Samaritan people. There was a good opportunity for a decisive act which, though severe in its outward appearance at first sight, would be seen on reflection to be entirely merciful in its end.

Moreover, while thus they seemed to themselves to reason, while great considerations of future good flashed through their excited minds, they scarcely stopped to think of the immediate

cause of their perturbation. Indeed who, without a resolute struggle, ever faces the truth about individual self, or the pettiness of his individual frailty? The disciples were wearied with a day's journey. They had for some time been walking on with the assured confidence that rest was close at hand. They had consoled themselves with expectations of honourable reception and grateful repose. Their hopes were suddenly dashed; their pleasant visions faded away. What was to be done? It was a practical question. They shrank from the miserable prospect of resuming their journey aimlessly, amid the jeers of the inhuman folk who triumphed over their discomfiture. Could not that ignominious ending be averted? Was it not a time for vengeance? Were there not good reasons for vengeance? The desire came first from the promptings of purely human frailty. The reasons came afterwards, almost unsought for and unasked. And the reasons were so grand, so noble, so satisfactory, so convincing, so easily expressed in stately phrases, that anger at the loss of a lodging was in a moment draped with the dignity of lofty patriotism; wounded vanity became zeal



for the Master's service ; vindictiveness claimed the high sounding title of deliberate policy.

These are motives, this is a method, common to all human affairs. There is nothing peculiarly ecclesiastical about them. They apply to any body of men who have a leader, and an object, and believe themselves to be in the possession of power.

But when the apostles proceeded to formulate a course of action, they seem to have felt the need of sheltering themselves under precedent, and claiming a divine sanction. "They said, Lord, wilt Thou that we bid fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" The reference is clear enough, without the explanatory addition "even as Elijah did." They had in their minds the life of the prophet whom they had just seen. He had overthrown his enemies by the power which God committed to him : surely Jesus also was possessed of a like power which might be called to their aid. At first they gazed on the untroubled face of their Master, and felt some difficulty in framing their thoughts. They were dimly conscious that it was useless to ask Him to take action in His own behalf. Yet

He had once committed some of His powers to their hands; might He not do so now? So the question was asked: "Lord, wilt Thou, that we call down fire from heaven?" They wished for permission from Him to do on His behalf what they felt He would not do for Himself. It might be that the time had come when the Master would cast aside His strange reserve, and boldly advance His claims on men's allegiance. At all events, sheltering themselves behind precedent, and offering themselves as the willing agents for a new departure, they preferred their request. It must have been with stammering tongues, and with a quick sense of shame before they reached the end of the sentence. They read the answer on the Lord's face, even before He "turned and rebuked them."

It may be said: "Did not the precedent to some extent justify them? Was not their mistake, if mistake it was at that time, natural?" We cannot admit that this was so; for Jesus did not explain, as He would have done in the case of pardonable ignorance: "He turned and rebuked them." Indeed, a little reflection will show that there was ample reason for rebuke. First of all, it

was presumptuous on their part to interfere at all, still more to suggest a line of action which experience had shown them to be contrary to the whole tenor of their Master's teaching. But more than this, we know that the rebukes of Jesus were of the nature of revelations ; they tore away the trappings of plausibility and left men face to face with their real motives. The Boanerges brethren had taken their stand on precedent. The rebuke of Jesus tore away that plea. It was not the thought of precedent which prompted the suggestion ; on the other hand, the precedent had been hastily and thoughtlessly caught at to give colour to their own passionate desires ; and they knew it, but tried to act as though they thought otherwise. They assumed a precedent to enable them to be at once advocates and judges of their own cause. For how did the precedent they hinted at bear on the case before them ? A body of wayfarers asked for hospitality, and it was refused them, ungraciously and insolently, by those from whom they asked it. What parallel was there in this to the case of a solitary man, surrounded by a body of soldiers who were ordered to lead him before a threatening king ? There

was in their case no imperious motive of self-preservation, nothing save disappointment and inconvenience.

Moreover, the action of Elijah, which they quoted, was part of a method of teaching which God applied to the circumstances of a particular time. It was part of a stern protest against national apostasy. It was a continuation of the warning, decisively given and shamefully neglected, on Mount Carmel, when it was proved that Baal was unreal and that Jehovah alone could send down fire on the sacrifice. The warning which Elijah was empowered to give at the beginning of his mission was repeated at its close. Nothing but fire from heaven could appeal to an age which preferred the corrupt nature-worship of Baal to the pure worship of Jehovah.

Again there was no parallel between the two cases, and the apostles had ample means of knowing it. They had followed their Master for long; they had seen His method, and listened to His teaching. Nothing that He had done or said afforded them a shred of reason for suggesting recourse to violence. What they did was really this. They yielded to a sudden access of resentment, and then picked up

an isolated fact in the past, which happened to have been lately brought before their minds, and proposed to Jesus that they should imitate it. "He turned and rebuked them." Did men wish to know the significance of that rebuke? It was because the apostles were entirely wrong, wrong from the very beginning; they had lost all hold of their Master's meaning. Human frailty had for the time put them utterly out of sympathy with Him, had made them forget all that they had learned from Him. The gust of human passion had blown away all the gentle atmosphere with which the companionship of Jesus had surrounded them. His spirit which usually sheltered them was gone: the spirit of the world had driven it away, and they hastened to clothe its promptings in some garb which might seem to bear God's mark upon it. "Ye know not," ye do not stop to think, "what manner of spirit ye are of." It was not intellectual error that caused moral confusion; it was moral error which welcomed intellectual confusion as an ally. They knew not, when they ought to have known; for the god of this world had blinded their eyes, so that they had no wish to see.

So then we have in this passage the account of a great mistake which the apostles made, for which they were rebuked. It was a moral mistake, in its origin, and only made a flimsy pretence of concealing its true nature by retreating under the covert of intellectual confusion. As such it was rebuked by Jesus in terms of unmistakable clearness.

How, then, we ask again, has the Church of Christ ever dared to persecute? There can only be one answer : because it was exposed to the same insidious temptations as beset the apostles, and it closed its ears to the Lord's rebuke. For we must recognise that persecution is not merely something horrible and hideous, but something which is terribly natural in itself. The desire of every man to have his own way becomes all the stronger when he knows that his way is a good way. It is appallingly easy to cover this natural desire with a fair appearance, to claim as from God authority which He has not conferred, and to misapply Scripture in justification of such a claim. This is what the Church unfortunately did in the fourth century, and I do not see that any extenuation can be pleaded for its misdoing. The Church was in

possession of an abiding and unalterable standard by which to judge its motives and try its actions. It was untrue to itself if it did not always act up to its knowledge. It was wrong when it deliberately abandoned its standard from reasons of expediency or self-interest. Its aims were higher than those of the world, and the two powers came into inevitable collision. The Church conquered by suffering, and then, in the moment of victory, yielded to the attraction of an alliance with the world to put down the foes who were undermining the faith within. The alliance, it is true, failed of its purpose; and the power of the State was invoked by both parties in turn. But none the less the precedent was established. Orthodoxy prevailed by its inherent truth. But the weapons once grasped remained in the Church's armoury, where for long intervals of peace they lay unused. When battle was impending they were furbished up anew, and it was claimed that they had received God's consecration. Popes and prelates, with their minds made up on purely worldly grounds, sought for precedents and rejoiced to find them. They perverted God's message, with which they were entrusted, to the level of the

world's maxims. They stifled conscience, they drowned the voice of understanding, they went far to quench the shining of the Light of the world, they certainly obscured its power to illuminate the dark places of politics and society.

Does this seem to be too harsh a judgment, too sweeping a condemnation of many great men in the past, who were in their day and generation benefactors to mankind? God forbid that we should rejoice in any false sense of superior enlightenment, or boast of freedom from like temptations. It is not without terror that we can face the awful lessons to be drawn from the imperfections of good men. It is only in a spirit of profound humility that we can approach such a subject, and its teaching ought to sink deep into our souls. But in considering the ways of man in the past, we are also considering the ways of God; and when these ways parted, we may neither shrink from saying so nor from estimating the true cause of their divergence. It may be natural to frame apologies for man; but that is only possible by lessening the fulness of God's revelation. "They were entrusted with the oracles of God. What if some were without



faith? shall their want of faith make of none effect the faithfulness of God? God forbid: yea, let God be found true, but every man a liar.”<sup>1</sup> We are judging man’s execution of God’s purposes. We have only too pressing need to learn how man’s want of faith is ever striving “to make of none effect the faithfulness of God.” It is well to learn this lesson in a ground where all right-minded men are agreed. It is well to abandon every shred of attempted palliation, and discover the root of bitterness, growing not in any particular age, or any particular institution, but inherent in human nature itself, and so stubbornly obstinate to spiritual influences that it even turns them from their purpose and perverts them to its own.

But, it may be urged, ought not some allowance to be made for intellectual error? It is a thought borne home to the mind of any one who reflects upon the past, that the sphere of human error in matters of morality is smaller than is generally supposed, and the sphere of sin is greater. We must not be misled by the success of nations, of movements, or of indivi-

<sup>1</sup> Rom. iii. 2, 3.

duals, to condone their misdoings. We must not be overcome by the glamour of great names. "It is not history which teaches conscience uprightness, it is conscience which teaches it to history. The accomplished fact is corrupting: it is for us to correct it by persisting in our ideal. The soul moralises the past that it may not be demoralised by it. Like the alchemists of the Middle Ages, it only finds in the crucible of experience the gold which itself has poured in before."<sup>1</sup> Men did wrong, not because they erred through ignorance, but because they took the shortest and most obvious means to secure their own immediate objects. This is seen clearly enough in the case of individuals. The rule, "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you," is in some form or other universally known and recognised. If it were universally acted upon, the world would be a very different place. But man waives it, as agent, and only pleads for its observance as patient. His desires are his own, and his first struggle is to attain their fulfilment. The severity of others' judgment on this outburst of selfishness tends to vary in proportion as they

<sup>1</sup> Amiel, *Journal Intime*, i., 32.

feel themselves personally menaced by it. They feel in themselves a certain kinship with the offender, which prompts them to plead in his behalf when his endeavour does not threaten any danger to themselves. "He was ignorant," they say, "ignorant of the amount of punishment which his act might bring upon himself, ignorant of the amount of suffering which it would entail on others. Had he known this, he would have paused; there is hope that the more perfect realisation of these things may bring into play counteracting motives which may be powerful enough to restrain him in the future." This may be true. But it cannot be pleaded that he was ignorant that his act was wrong, that he would not have condemned it if it had been wrought upon himself. If he had thought he might have known; but he did not wish for knowledge lest it might restrain him. Christianity comes to man's help by developing this knowledge. It sets over against what man is, an ideal of what he may become; against desires pressing from without, a sense of possibilities within; against the natural self, the spiritual self; against the tempter, the vision of the Incarnate Lord. It creates a consciousness which acts as

instantaneously as the evil against which it is directed.

In the case of a society such as the State, the same holds good as holds good of the individual. The State aims at satisfying the dominant interests of the community, and is generally judged simply by reference to its immediate success. Statesmen are counted great if they did what they intended to do. The rightness or wrongness of their aims or methods is only taken into account when they result in ultimate failure. Whatever succeeds is assumed to be a step in human progress; and it is justified by reference to some general principle which resolves itself into grateful acceptance of the accomplished fact. The actors in great affairs are, as a rule, leniently dealt with, till the results of their activity have been outlived. Their public crimes are often less harshly judged than their private vices. They are sometimes condemned as individuals, but extolled as bodies of men. Their misdeeds are obscurely palliated by reference to some supposed standard of morality peculiar to their age and generation. But, it may be asked, did mankind in Christian times ever think that deceit, treachery, violence or

murder were other than sinful ; or that their criminality diminished if they were perpetrated on a sufficiently large scale ?

The standard of ethical judgment in dealing with secular history needs raising ; but in treating the history of the Christian Church we are concerned with the actions of a body which possessed principles above the motives of temporary expediency. It is some satisfaction to find that men's consciences are more sensitive when they judge the Church, than when they judge the State. They are ready to admit, with sorrow or with exultation according as they approach the subject, the discrepancy, too frequently apparent, between the professed aims of the religious organisation and the actual means by which those aims were pursued. I do not think it right to shrink from learning the lessons which the contrast teaches. I think it well that they should be accepted to the full, and that no extenuation should be pleaded on the ground of ignorance of principles. Men failed because they did not wish to apply the principles which they professed.

“ But,” it may be said, “ there were in the Old Testament precedents for persecution, and there

were severe sayings in the New Testament, which may have lent themselves to misunderstanding.” Reserving for the present the question of the influence of the New Testament, let us consider if the Church had any ground for finding in the Old Testament a sanction for persecution. Now the citation of precedent is always a forensic method of procedure. The man who cites a precedent claims, by doing so, that he has thought the matter over, and is not arguing merely from utility, but from reference to some principle, which is more apparent in another instance of a parallel kind. It is obvious that it is not enough to plead, “This was once done, therefore I do it again.” It must be shown that the same law applies to both cases with the same authority and the same sanction. A knowledge of the principles of legal interpretation was not wanting when persecution first began.

Did men misunderstand or did they misuse the Old Testament Scriptures? Was their ignorance pardonable, because they lacked guidance, or did they wilfully neglect the guidance which they amply enjoyed?

Nowadays we are familiar with the conception

of the Old Testament as being a record of man's gradual training to apprehend spiritual knowledge. We see in it the history of God's work for man's restoration. We trace the process of selection, and of gradual discipline within the selected sphere. The historical books of the Old Testament contain the annals of a nation's life. That national life passed through the phases and incidents with which we are familiar in the history of other nations; but it was animated by a divine purpose, which in times of national forgetfulness was recalled to the popular mind by significant manifestations, in forms intelligible to the conditions into which they had sunk. What we learn from this record is the difficulty attending on man's restoration. What strikes us is not the frequency or the continuousness of divine interposition, but its rarity. A body of men were raised from savagery to industry by the stern discipline of slavery, then were trained into a nation by the hardships of wandering and the severities of military life. At great crises God manifests His presence for their encouragement; for long periods they are left to work out their problems by themselves; appeals are made to their intelli-

gence and their moral sense by purely human means. Only when all else had failed and national apostasy was imminent, only when the remnant that did not bow the knee to Baal was scanty, isolated and depressed, only then was a manifestation of God's power vouchsafed for a brief period to check the threatened corruption of the nation. Then that nation, somewhat invigorated from within, was left to learn from the miseries of political downfall, and from the sufferings and yearnings of the exile, which again selected a remnant sufficiently resolute to take in hand a restoration of the national life, based on a firm hold of the national religion. Such are the lessons which we learn from the Old Testament. Was there ever any reason why it should have been regarded as a collection of examples, to be imitated in the letter without any consideration of circumstance or occasion?

I can only answer that writers of the fourth century regarded the Old Testament much as we do now; and that St. Chrysostom laid down principles for its practical use which apply forcibly to the question before us. Commenting on the Sermon on the Mount, he discusses the educational



value of the Old Testament, and concludes: "Let us then not merely look at the facts, but also carefully investigate the occasion, the cause, the motive, the difference of persons, and all the surrounding circumstances: for only so can we reach the truth."<sup>1</sup> It was not defective exegesis of the Old Testament which led men to adopt persecution. They acted from the same motives as did James and John in my text, and like them caught at precedents to justify their actions without considering "the manner of spirit they were of." The fairest statement of their error would perhaps be this. They knew that there was a wrath of God working for righteousness; they chose to assume that their own wrath, the wrath of man, could work the righteousness of God. Yet it was precisely this assumption which our Lord rebuked in the case of two of His apostles.

When once the false assumption had been made, men ceased to turn to God's Word for guidance, but used it to give sanction to their own devices. When a man sets up idols in his heart, God

<sup>1</sup> Chrysostom, *Homil. in Matthæum*, xvii., quoted by Mr. Gore in *Lux Mundi*, 330, where other references also are given.

answers him according to his idols. Rebellion against the Holy Spirit is punished by increasing deadness of conscience.

These reflections are prompted by the fact that the passage which I have taken for my text is actually quoted by a writer of the sixteenth century as an argument in favour of persecution. This may seem an act of incredible audacity, but it is in accordance with the whole tenor of a bulky volume. The Spanish theologian, Paramo, regards the development of the Inquisition as the central fact in human history. It was instituted by God Himself in the case of Adam and Eve. The call, "Adam, where art thou?" was a formal summons to the accused. On his appearance the court was opened, and he was interrogated about the facts of the accusation laid to his charge. Adam accused Eve, who was called in turn; Eve accused the serpent, who was not called, as incapable of repentance. Then Adam was condemned, on his own admission, on seven counts: pride, immoderate love of his wife, unbelief, curiosity, particular disobedience, false excusation, and finally wrong-doing to his neighbour, for "in Adam all die."

Paramo shows how the Inquisitors follow this procedure. They cite the accused, who, like Adam, try to hide themselves, and give, as their reason, fear of the court, which is in itself a sign of guilt. Then they confess their offence like Adam, "not humbly seeking pardon, but proudly excusing themselves, and casting the blame on others." The Inquisitor follows the Divine example in pursuing all who are thus inculpated, so as to reach the origin and source of evil. As God judged by Himself, not in the presence of the angels, so the Inquisitors hold their court in secrecy. As God made for Adam and Eve coats of skins, so the Inquisitors clothe their culprits in *san benitos*. As God expelled Adam and Eve from Paradise, so the Inquisitor confiscates the goods of heretics.

After this Paramo has no need of precedent drawn from human history. He pays little heed to the records of the Old Testament, but claims our Lord Himself as "the head of the present Inquisition, and the producer of the most complete results"; because the authority of the Inquisition proceeds from that which was committed by Christ to St. Peter and his successors. Its legal

basis is, that all baptised persons, if they deviate from the faith, must be compelled to keep it. This principle is, in his eyes, so self-evident that it needs no proof. He only searches Scripture for mentions of the nature of the penalty to be inflicted, and so remarks, with entire unconsciousness: "Our Lord, passing through Galilee and the midst of Samaria, sends messengers into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for Him. The Samaritans did not receive Him, and James and John were of opinion that they should be punished by fire from heaven. Here is the punishment of heretics, namely, fire; for the Samaritans were the heretics of that age." <sup>1</sup>

True, fire was the punishment which the unregenerate heart proposed; but the Lord rebuked the proposal. The unregenerate heart at any age longs to work its will by force, and catches at the suggestion wherever it comes from. It is the words and deeds of men, recorded in the Scriptures, which it welcomes: the Divine rebuke, the Divine comment, the Divine interpretation it passes by. Are we to excuse such a use of

<sup>1</sup> Paramo, *De Origine et Progressu Officii Sanctæ Inquisitionis, ejusque dignitate et utilitate.* Madrid, 1598, p. 84.

Scripture? Are we to allow God's Word to suffer that man's wickedness may be excused? Paramo's leading principle was really this, that any organisation had the right to use such means as it thought fit to maintain itself in power. The Church was the keeper of God's message to mankind, a message to the soul, to the conscience, to the heart. When God's message was turned into the Church's message; when it was no longer the allegiance of the heart to God, but the obedience of the person to the Church which was sought; then the Church ceased so far to be the Church, and became a section of the world. Then it used the Word of God as a book of human laws, and showed the same perverse ingenuity, which man has always shown, in paring down obligation till it fitted the mould of his ambitious desire.

I have taken a conspicuous example from the history of the most ancient organisation of the Western Church. Do not, however, suppose that the spirit of persecution disappeared when the old system was remodelled. It found its way into the reformed organisations: it was thought necessary for the maintenance of civil society by

Luther; it was practised by Calvin; it was carried to the New World; it was advocated by the Puritans; it was embodied in the laws of England. No religious body, of any antiquity, which obtained the possession of power, can plead that it did not wish to use it for its own support.

We cannot overestimate the serious consequences of such delinquency. The organisation, which owed its origin to its mission to represent the spirit of its Master, misrepresented that spirit in its primary aspect. For what is the Bible but a record of God's infinite patience and long-suffering, of His respect for man's freedom, His care for the maintenance of personal responsibility? The Incarnation meant, and was understood to mean, that man's ransom, man's redemption, was wrought by patient endurance, and was to be brought home to individual consciences by like means throughout the ages. The kingdom of heaven was within; it came not by observation. Its spread was to be gradual and natural, due to its own intrinsic power, the little leaven, the grain of mustard seed. When our attention is turned to this particular point we cannot fail to be struck with the fact that the parables and

teaching of Jesus avoid any analogy drawn from human action, and refer instead to the peaceful processes of nature. Men may be called to do violence to themselves, never to others. Judgment is never committed to men; it is reserved for the tribunal of God.

The origin of the spirit of persecution is made clear in the story recorded in my text. It comes from the universal sense of inconvenience, when we do not at once get our own way. Then follows impatience, irritation, and resentment. Then reason is called in to help passion, and clothe the feelings with the semblance of deliberate action founded on policy and expediency. The love of power comes next, suggesting the future good to be obtained from a prompt display of resoluteness. Power supplies its own justification; for would it be there if it were not meant to be used? And who can blame it when it has succeeded? Then comes "that last infirmity of noble minds," the hope for fame, the gratification that attends success, the proud consciousness of having cleared a difficulty out of the way.

All this is so natural, and yet so wrong. It

is the form taken by our analysis of motives dominant in the direction of current politics, when that direction does not commend itself to ourselves. We are keenly conscious of the imperfections of those from whom we differ, and deny that in their case the end justifies the means. When things are going in the direction which we on the whole approve, we are not so severely critical. We condone the action necessary to give effect to what we call a principle, but what often is the arrangement which gives us the least trouble, which does not affect our own interests, and removes immediate difficulties from the way. Let us remember that the message of Jesus, the proclamation of the Kingdom, was a call to every man to rid himself of prejudices and prepossessions, even the most respectable and the most venerable; to rise above the world's method, and test action not by its seeming claims, but by its actual correspondency with the righteousness of God. Success, the success to which God calls us, is the triumph of inward influence, not of outward power. When power takes the place of influence, it wins the triumph of the world, not of God. So long as the desire for outward achievement over-



masters the primary duty of care to preserve the delicacy and sensitiveness of conscience, the root of the persecuting spirit remains in the heart. That spirit itself may be dormant because things are going well with us ; it may be held in check by a temporary equilibrium of social forces ; but it is there, and the spirit of Christ alone can overcome it.

Persecution was condemned by Christ in the most emphatic way. It is unfair to charge against Christianity that which is in open contradiction to its principles, that which Christianity more than anything else has taught us to abhor.

## II.

### THE INTOLERANCE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

“If any man preacheth unto you any gospel other than that which ye received, let him be anathema.” (Gal. i. 9.)

I HAVE maintained that the spirit of persecution was alien from the teaching of Christ, and was expressly condemned by Him; that its presence in the Church was due to causes and motives which are ever present and operative in human nature; that we can only deplore the imperfections of those who admitted it; and that we may not assign their error to intellectual but to moral deficiencies. I have pointed out that the possession of power, the desire for tangible results, and the worship of success, are subtle and insidious temptations from which it is difficult for any organisation to escape scathless.

Having laid down these general principles I propose to pursue their application to actual facts. But before doing so, there is need of

some definition. By persecution I mean the infliction of punishment for erroneous opinions, as such. It has been asserted, with some appearance of plausibility, that there is only one way to escape from this necessity, and that is by the conviction, or assumption, that opinions are a matter of indifference. It is then argued that as the Christian Church cannot admit this assumption, it contains of necessity the germs of the persecuting spirit, and indeed its earliest organisation shows signs of them. The New Testament itself contains examples of the infliction of punishment on erring members of the Church; so that it may be argued that the fact of admission to the Christian Church was regarded in the earliest times as subjecting the individual to the possibility of the severest penalty at the hands of the ecclesiastical authorities. In fact, the claim to a possession of truth leads to the condemnation of what is opposed to it, and the step from the condemnation of falsehood to its forcible suppression is inevitable.

Reserving the consideration of this latter proposition, I would consider the intolerance displayed in the New Testament—that is, the nature of the

false opinions there condemned, the character of the condemnation, and the means by which it was applied.

(1) The Gospels contain stern and unsparing denunciation uttered by our Lord against the Pharisees, together with statements of the reasons for which they were uttered. The Pharisees were the religious teachers of the nation, and the mode in which they discharged their function was dragged to light and criticised. They were judged by the standard which they professed to follow, and were convicted of being untrue to their trust. They "made void the Word of God because of their tradition."<sup>1</sup> They "left the commandments of God, and held fast the tradition of men."<sup>2</sup> They were, therefore, "blind guides" in relation to those whom they professed to lead;<sup>3</sup> as their motives were those of self-interest they were consciously "hypocrites";<sup>4</sup> as their method consisted in frittering away great principles, while professing to apply them to details, they were "foolish."<sup>5</sup>

The setting forth of new truth must necessarily

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt. xv. 6.    <sup>2</sup> St. Mark vii. 8.    <sup>3</sup> St. Matt. xv. 14.

<sup>4</sup> St. Matt. xxiii. 1-34; St. Luke xi. 42-4.    <sup>5</sup> St. Luke xi. 40.

involve some criticism of the prevailing system, to determine where it is defective, to show how it is to be supplemented, and to discover the points of attachment of the new system. This is what our Lord did. He declared that He came to extend existing knowledge; and if that knowledge had been held in its purity, His extension of it would seem natural and obvious. But the old knowledge had been corrupted, and He had to waken men to a sense of its corruption. He traced the process to its source in the moral defects of those who were its authorised teachers. They had abused their position and their privileges for their own ends; they had substituted their "tradition" for the Law; they had done so by methods which would not stand the test of intelligence; they were radically insincere and selfish. In short, our Lord's denunciations were directed against the rulers of a faithless Church, who were powerful, popular, and domineering. They were condemned, but no judgment was executed upon them. No weapons were used save words. They were addressed with arguments; with appeals to conscience; with satire which might rend the veil of habit; with solemn warnings of judg-

ment to come. Everything was said which might carry conviction and reach the heart or the head. But there was no hint of human interference, no call upon men to constitute themselves the instruments of God's judgment.

(2) Let us consider the relation of the apostles to false teaching and false teachers. The apostles were entrusted with a message, and they met with opposition of various kinds. The opposition of the dull, hard world was encountered only with patience. Some special forms of opposition roused indignation. Thus Elymas, who was jealous of the victory of the truth, as likely to reduce his own importance, was denounced by St. Paul as "full of all guile and all villainy, a son of the devil, an enemy of all righteousness" because he "perverted the right ways of the Lord."<sup>1</sup> He was told that the hand of the Lord was upon him, and the punishment of physical blindness was a sign of his mental condition. This was the unmasking of a powerful and successful impostor, who applied all his capacities to forward his own interests. In the same way St. Paul in his Epistles warns his disciples against some teachers who perverted the truth

<sup>1</sup> Acts xiii. 10.

through unworthy motives. There are "false apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ."<sup>1</sup> They "served not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and fair speeches beguiled the hearts of the innocent."<sup>2</sup> They are "the enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is perdition; whose god is their belly; who mind earthly things."<sup>3</sup> In the Pastoral Epistles he reminds Timothy of his responsibility for the character of the teaching which was given in the name of Christ. He was to "take heed to himself and to the doctrine." He was to "charge certain men not to teach a different doctrine."<sup>4</sup> He was to guard his flock against the evils of the "hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their conscience as with a hot iron,"<sup>5</sup> "men corrupted in mind and bereft of the truth, supposing that godliness is a way of gain."<sup>6</sup> In like manner he bids Titus "stop the mouths of men who teach what they ought not for filthy lucre's sake."<sup>7</sup>

In all this, the grounds of St. Paul's condemna-

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. xi. 13-15.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. xvi. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Phil. iii. 18, 19.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Tim. i. 3.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 2.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Tim. vi. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Tit. i. 11.

tion are mainly moral; his censures are directed against the character of the false teachers, whose insincere motives are exposed to view.

What does he say about wrong opinion? We need not go beyond the Epistle to the Galatian Churches—an Epistle which bears traces of serious disappointment and distress, and is couched in language of strong personal feeling, natural to a man who sees his authority attacked, and his work being undone. The strongest expression used by St. Paul is that which I have taken as my text: “Though we or an angel from heaven should preach unto you any Gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema.” This certainly states that there is a definite Gospel, which may not be changed; and further, that perversion of it (*μεταστρέψαι*), the turning it backwards, the reversal of it, put a man outside the claim to Christian privileges. Whether *ἀνάθεμα* refers to ecclesiastical excommunication, or to the spiritual condition of the offender, is not material to our purpose. St. Paul strongly asserts that the Gospel message, on which the Church was built, was something definite and was not to be explained



away. Those who held the contrary of the Gospel could not obtain the gifts which the Gospel had to give. We know what were the opinions about which St. Paul was speaking. They were opinions which would have made Christianity a sect of Judaism, and would have laid upon Gentile converts all the ritual of the ceremonial law. St. Paul does not meet these opinions with any other weapon than argument. He does not inflict any punishment on these Judaisers. He only insists strongly that what they are teaching is not Christianity, and must not be regarded as such. Let the Jews stand by their own system, if they will; but let them not lead those who have accepted the liberty of Christ back again into the bondage of the law. St. Paul, in fact, is protecting the tender young plant of spiritual freedom, which had not yet taken firm root, against a canker which would destroy its growth. He insists upon a full realisation of what Christianity means; he urges the Galatian converts to accept the responsibility of their new position.

The attitude of St. Paul towards false teaching follows close on that of our Lord. His object is to preserve the purity of the Divine revelation, to

prevent it from being degraded to an instrument of human ambition. His method is unsparing denunciation of error, unveiling of motives, and keenly argumentative refutation of fallacies. His position, both positively and negatively, is best explained in his own words. He worked, "not handling the word of God deceitfully; but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But and if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them that are perishing; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them." <sup>1</sup>

The utterances of St. John correspond closely with those of St. Paul, in their general spirit. It is true that, having to face more decided forms of error, he has a more decided standard by which to try them. To him the false teachers are Anti-christ,<sup>2</sup> and are not to be received or welcomed by the faithful.<sup>3</sup> Those who are to be thus excluded are they who "confess not that Jesus Christ

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 2-4.

<sup>2</sup> 1 John ii. 18-22; iv. 1-3.

<sup>3</sup> 2 John 7-11.

cometh in the flesh." The Incarnation was to St. John the test of Christianity.

(3) Account must also be taken of the growth of the Church as an organised body, and of the discipline which was consequently involved. The apostles were endowed with extraordinary powers, necessary for the establishment of the Church, but not necessary for its permanent maintenance. These powers were exercised for healing the sick and for conveying special gifts of the Holy Spirit ; sometimes, but rarely, they were used for punishment. But in such the action of the apostles was declaratory of God's purpose. The punishment came from Him, just as the healing came from Him, or the visible manifestation of the gift of the Holy Spirit descended directly from on high. These special powers were committed to the Church as a means of teaching it the abiding presence of God. They were withdrawn when they had served their purpose of indicating the duties to be permanently performed. To "gifts of tongues" succeeded orderly human teaching ; to "gifts of healing" succeeded healing by educated human skill ; to supernatural punishment succeeded discipline by orderly human

agency. The record of punishment establishes the need of discipline; but it is to be noted that the punishment was inflicted, not for erroneous opinion, but for moral offences.

For the purpose of each penalty recorded in the New Testament was to tear away the veil of hypocrisy, and to assert that the primary requisite to be maintained in the Christian Church was integrity of conscience. The sin of Ananias was not avarice but an hypocritical attempt to obtain credit for greater self-sacrifice than he was capable of, in other words of professing a deeper faith than he really possessed.<sup>1</sup> How profoundly significant it is that this should have been the first truth about the conditions of membership which was seared with almost startling emphasis into the consciousness of the rising Church. So too it was with the punishment, whatever it might be, inflicted on the Corinthian adulterer.<sup>2</sup> His offence was moral; he was visited by some form of physical affliction, that through bodily pain he might learn to curb the unlawful desires of the flesh, and so be brought to penitence. We have set before us a revelation of God's dealings with

<sup>1</sup> Acts v. 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. v. 1-5.

an erring servant. The sins of the flesh dull and deaden the conscience, and their luckless slave can often combine them with religious profession. They have eaten the heart out of him, and left a hollow shell which still retains the semblance of a former self. How is such an one to be aroused save by some sharp chastisement, which withdraws from him the power of indulgence, forces him to see himself as he really is, stings him into a recognition of his sin, and leads him to an inward destruction of the flesh, from which the spirit emerges sorrowful but cleansed? It is not an example of human punishment which is set before us, but is rather a special and authoritative declaration of the moral purpose of God's physical laws.

So too in the case of Hymenæus and Alexander, who are only mentioned incidentally, but the cause of their punishment is clear in the reference.<sup>1</sup> It was not for wrong opinion as such, but because "they put away from themselves a good conscience, and so made shipwreck concerning the faith." It was some form of evil living, entirely at variance with their Christian profession, which destroyed the

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. i. 18-20.

integrity of their conscience and turned them into avowed enemies of the Gospel. They retained the appearance of Christians only that they might lead others astray. Bodily suffering was in their case also to be a sharp discipline to teach them not to blaspheme. It was a warning that God punished hypocrisy, and hated every form of outward profession which did not correspond with genuine belief.

Thus, not only do the punishments inflicted by the apostles as rulers of the Church afford no precedent for subsequent times, because the punishment came from God, and required no human intervention; but the offence for which the penalty was inflicted was beyond the ken of human judgment. The cases were rare, and the apostolic intervention was exceptional. It was just enough to be markedly significant to after times of the primary need of absolute sincerity on the part of every one who professed to be a soldier of Christ. It reminds us of the dangers which may lie hid under a fair appearance. It warns us against the futility of outward uniformity. It insists that the Christian body, however small it may be, must be above all things sincere. It tells us of the pre-

eminent need of a good conscience, of the awful sin of lying unto God. The Church is warned that it must preserve its purity by separating from offenders; but it is not authorised by anything contained in the New Testament to force by punishment the acceptance of formulæ on its members. For, be it noted, there were many forms of sin and error prevalent in the Corinthian Church ; but one case only was selected for punishment. There are many forms of sin and error which St. Paul exhorts Timothy to combat, but only one concerning which he cites an example of penalty inflicted. Errors that came from thoughtlessness, pride, vanity, frailty, folly, intellectual narrowness or prejudice, these are mentioned in abundance, and were to be met by rebuke, exhortation, and persuasion. There were many things that needed to be set in order, but not by punishment. That was reserved for typical and conspicuous instances of deliberate attempts to ally Christianity with unrighteousness, and make it a vehicle, not for the spirit of God, but for the spirit of the world. God's spirit could, and did, operate slowly upon the rudimentary conscience of the natural man, who was not all at once weaned from his frailty and made master of

himself. Imperfect knowledge, imperfect faith, imperfect love, imperfect worship, imperfect aspiration, these could be remedied by the working of the Spirit in the souls which admitted Him. But such cases must be distinguished from those others who chose to call themselves by the name of Christ, but were none of His ; who strove to strew the path of the rising Church with the whited sepulchres which lined the road it had abandoned. Its beginnings at least should be clear of such deceitful adornments. It should go forth with unmistakable warnings that sincerity was to be the one true mark of every structure that it raised.

Thus the punishments inflicted by the apostles afford no ground for the claim of coercive authority by the Church in after times.

(4) But, it is urged, the language used by apostles favours the conception of a rigid orthodoxy which admits of no deviation, and pronounces other opinions to be sinful. The step from St. Paul's denunciations of false teaching to the practice of the Inquisition is one which can be filled in by a series of small gradations. If right opinion is of primary importance, it is natural for men to enforce it when they have the power. Indeed,



it is said, in the later books of the New Testament a progressive increase of severity against erroneous opinions can be clearly traced, and St. John speaks even more strongly than does St. Paul. The denunciations, it is said, in the Second Epistle of St. Peter, the Epistle of St. Jude, and the Apocalypse, wax louder and sharper.

But what these apostles denounce is the incursion of the profligacy of paganism into the assemblies of Christian worshippers. I need not pursue this point into detail; but surely indignation was called for against men "revelling in their love-feasts while they feast with you; having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin"; men who defile the flesh and bring into the community the insidious temptation wherewith Balaam perverted the children of Israel; women who seduce God's servants to commit fornication. Surely it was needful that Christianity should be rescued from the danger of assimilating in any form the orgiastic spirit of Oriental worship. Indignation at moral obliquity cannot be claimed as a justification for persecution, which I have defined to be the infliction of punishment for erroneous opinions as such.

Without the warnings contained in the apostolic letters the Divine record would have been incomplete for our guidance. The Gospels tell us of God's revelation in the person of the Lord, of the manifestation there made of the purpose of man's life, and of the means by which that purpose could be attained. The Acts of the Apostles tell us of the way in which that revelation was made known by human agents, and the way in which it was accepted. The Epistles afford us an insight into the difficulties which were experienced in giving expression to this new truth in the individual life of the early converts, the difficulties of co-ordinating their new attitude towards life and its duties with the facts and tendencies of human society.

Let us see what these difficulties were. God's truth about life was revealed to the world. Those who accepted it did so from conviction, and only asked to be allowed to act up to it. But the society in which they lived would not allow them to do so; it tried to explain away God's truth and turn it into its own shapes and forms. St. Paul in my text utters a warning which applies to every age. The truth of God's revelation has

an exclusive claim on man's allegiance, and must be accepted for what it professes to be. It is not one element out of many which make up human morality or promote human civilisation; it is all-sufficient in itself. Jesus is not a way, a truth, a life: He is the Way, the Truth, the Life. Some may be willing to weave His teaching into their own opinions, and in so doing may frame for themselves an imaginary Christ. But the Church sets forth the historical Christ of the Gospel record, as being in Himself the Truth, in whom and through whom alone truth could be perfectly known. The distinction between opinions about Him, as one element in human knowledge, and Himself as the all-comprehensive source of truth, must be clearly maintained. The Church had to learn the contents of its eternal testimony.

This testimony is equally necessary in every age. Man is born into a world which has grown old in its own devices. He is surrounded by habits, conventions, systems, thoughts and feelings which have been developed by the wit and the wisdom of all the ages which have gone before. He may know that he bears a talisman which will guide him safely through the labyrinth. He may begin his quest

with a firm grasp of the sword of the Spirit. Will he always have the constancy to use it against the dragons which confront him in menacing array? Will he have the strength to hew his way through the darkening jungle till he reach the hidden palace of his dreams? There are many temptations to rest in pleasant meadows and let the sword drop from his nerveless hand. There are many trim abodes of grey-haired dotards who seek to dissuade him by the wise saws of experience. The sword is heavy; why not exchange it for another? Others have done well enough with lighter weapons.

The apostolic writings come to us as the voices of leaders who steadfastly wielded their weapons because they knew their value; who uttered the needful warnings to their followers, and repelled the insidious influences of the world-spirit. For the object of the world-spirit is ever the same, to induce man to trust in his natural strength, to let go his heavenly weapons, and content himself with some nearer goal than that which he was bidden to pursue. "What," say some, with an air of superior wisdom, "what, that the only sword? Nay, our museums of antiquities contain many

just like it, which have now fallen into merited disuse." "Stop," say others, "and fit it with a more practicable handle; you will never be able to use it as it is." There is no lack of sage advice. "It is too new." "It is too old." "How are you sure that it is right?" The cries are endless, and are often contradictory. Each age repeats the process. Each man who grasps the sword has to endure the same trial. How precious is the knowledge that it was so from the beginning! How invigorating the accents of those whom God appointed to encourage the pilgrims who first began their progress through a world forlorn!

For from the very first the difficulty was to escape the snares, not of the world at its worst, but of the world at its best. Faithful souls saw the truth of the Gospel, and thought that they had made it their own. But the world-spirit in its most attractive form gathered round them. They were men of sincerity, men who were in earnest. It is just such men of whom the world stands most in need. Judaism would not let them go; paganism would not let them go. They pleaded that they were ancient systems; they asserted that they contained much that was true; they professed

that they were willing to be reformed, to be spiritualised, to be extended: they urged the vastly superior field of influence which they could offer to those who would make use of them in moderation; they warned the inconspicuous body struggling into existence of the futility of their hopes; they suggested partnership. Many of the new converts were ready to listen. The experiment was worth trying. We know as a matter of history how little the experiment availed. We hear in the utterances of the apostles the cries of leaders who saw the real issue, the disastrous issue, of this futile compromise. Men may accept or reject the Christian faith, they assert; but if they accept it, they must accept it as it is. Jesus Christ cannot be obscured by Jewish ritual, nor will He receive men's souls while their bodies are left to paganism. Yet the old systems, which were in possession, strove desperately to lay their hands on Him, and make Him and His their own.

This is a necessary lesson, a most necessary lesson for future times; for no time more than our own. Much of the prevalent indifference to religion is due to an impression that there can be no such thing as truth in religion, or that it cannot

be apprehended as truth. The Church maintains that Jesus Christ is the Truth. "His own nature must be so inwardly at one with the nature of man, and of every world in which man can move, that in the knowledge of Him must be folded up the knowledge of all things."<sup>1</sup> Philosophers and philanthropists are ready to praise Christianity as a system of morals, while they destroy it as a religion. The life of Jesus was beautiful; His precepts were admirable; His temper was most attractive; His death was most touching. He is through all ages a type, a symbol, an example, round which all the sentiments which are noblest and most permanent in man's nature will certainly gather. If this were all, there would have been no difficulties, because there would have been few advantages. A noble example added to the list of those whose refining influence is acknowledged by thoughtful minds, would have raised no question and created no disturbance. But the apostles preached that Jesus was the Son of God, who died to redeem men from sin, who rose again to assure them of immortality, who ascended into heaven, whence

<sup>1</sup> Hort, *The Way, the Truth, and the Life*, p. 53. The whole of this very pregnant essay is worthy of the closest study.

He sends down the perpetual gifts of the Holy Spirit. Such a statement was the beginning of a new conception of life among those who received it. It challenged the acceptance or rejection of all who heard it. It suggested to many minds that at least it could be partially adopted to their own purposes.

It was this last design which the warnings of the apostles were intended to frustrate. "The faith of Christ," they said, "stands by itself: it cannot be mixed with previous systems, nor adjusted to the standard of the world." "What a pity," says the superior person of the present day, "what a pity that they insisted so much on this point. Their insistence certainly opened the door to wrong-doing and produced much misery. Christianity by being made dogmatic lost much of its spiritual meaning and wasted its force in barren controversy." This is the line of argument of an age in which moral philosophy as a basis for practical philanthropy is the fashion. When the apostles wrote, Judaism was the fashion amongst some, and Paganism amongst others. Excellent people among the Jews and the Pagans were willing to absorb something of the spirit of



Christianity. The apostles had to warn the disciples that this was not what Jesus came to accomplish. Tolerance, sympathy and charity are Christian virtues ; but they must be cultivated without the sacrifice of truth. The maintenance of the truth above all things, by living in it, suffering for it, dying for it : this was what the apostles taught. But there is no warrant in this for compelling others to accept it, or impressing it upon them by force. Absolute and unswerving faith, fervent zeal, persistent courage in witnessing the good confession, these are necessary elements in the Christian character at all times ; but these are possible without the use of worldly weapons, nay, they die away and become inoperative if they rest upon any other basis than that which trust in God supplies.

### III.

#### THE CHURCH IN RELATION TO PERSECUTION.

HAVING discussed the principles laid down in the New Testament relating to the preservation of the faith and the means by which it was to be accomplished, I would point out briefly the causes which induced the Church to deviate from the lines there traced for its guidance, and the evils which consequently ensued.

It would be impossible for me to follow the history of the infant Church. The prevalent systems of the world tried to lay hold of it as soon as it came into being. The world-power of the empire tried to destroy it. The world-wisdom of philosophy tried to explain it away. The age of the martyrs has a powerful attraction even to the casual reader; the age of the heresies leaves him bewildered and depressed. Yet the agents in both were discharging an equally necessary function. Both were upholding the truth of the

Gospel; the one against the power of the world, the other against the wisdom of the world. The martyrs had this advantage, that the force of their testimony was concentrated into one supreme moment, was expressed in one heroic act, which commands universal sympathy. The controversialists had to live through a protracted struggle, and are judged by all their utterances, and all their human weakness which the conflict remorselessly revealed. But there were traces of imperfection in both, imperfection which we dare not refuse to recognise. "Even while we read with tears," writes Dean Church,<sup>1</sup> "and with a thrill of awe and joy, the *Acta Martyrum*, can we help wishing sometimes that things had been different; that sometimes there had been more self-restraint, less defiance, more command over the over-wrought and over-strained heart, more quietness and calm in the eye of the storm, amid the provoking of all men? Are we not compelled to see, amid so much that was universal, so much that was loftier and wider than anything the world had known, the occasional narrowness, the occasional fierce-

<sup>1</sup> "The Imperfections of Religious Men," in *Cathedral and University Sermons*, 279.

ness, the occasional self-satisfaction and despising of others, which was the natural growth of circumstances, when the greatest and most divine of societies was forced into the apparent position of a little sect?" If this be true of martyrs, how much more evident are such defects in controversialists! We can only say that many of the greatest of them said things which we could have wished unsaid. Yet despite occasional outbursts of unrestrained indignation against erroneous opinions, there is clearly to be traced the profound consciousness that God will accept nothing save the homage of a willing heart. "No one," says Tertullian,<sup>1</sup> "would wish to be venerated unwillingly, not even a man." "It is for us," says Cyprian,<sup>2</sup> "to do our utmost that we may be vessels of gold or of silver; to God only is it given to break the vessels of clay. The servant cannot be greater than his Lord. No one may take upon himself what the Father has given to the Son only. No one may undertake to purge the threshing floor or sever the wheat from the tares by human judgment. This is proud obstinacy, and sacrilegious presumption springing from wicked

<sup>1</sup> *Apologeticus*, c. xxiv.

<sup>2</sup> *Epistole*, 51.

anger.” “Belief,” says Lactantius,<sup>1</sup> “cannot be enforced, for he who lacks piety is useless to God.”

When Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, it passed into a sphere which was not of its own creation. It is natural for any human society to wish for order, and to find order in uniformity. The massive organisation of the Roman State had tried to crush Christianity, because it claimed an independent existence; when Christianity could not be crushed it was adopted. It is ever so: the State must accept any power that exists, and must use it for its purposes. Uniformity of religious belief was ruled by the State to be necessary, and was enforced accordingly. This was contradictory to the spirit of the Church, and was long felt to be so. Yet the Church gave way to the supposed necessities of its new position. Paganism was forbidden: heretics were reduced to obedience by the strong arm of the law. When the penalty of death was first inflicted for erroneous opinions, the Christian conscience was profoundly shocked.

<sup>1</sup> *Div. Instit.*, v., 29. I owe these references to Lea, *History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, i., 212.

It is worth while to recall the circumstances, because they carry with them a valuable lesson.

A Spaniard, Priscillian, attracted many followers by his mystical and somewhat pantheistic teaching. He was accused of reviving manichæan and gnostic doctrines, and his opinions were condemned by a synod. He contrived, however, to obtain the support of the emperor, till a revolt in Britain placed in Gaul a successful usurper, Maximus; and two orthodox bishops brought before him their complaints against Priscillian. Maximus condemned to death Priscillian and six of his adherents.<sup>1</sup> Against this proceeding Bishop Martin of Tours protested with all his might: he wrote to the over-zealous prosecutors that they should abstain; he implored Maximus to abstain from bloodshed; it was enough that heretics should be judged by their bishops and be suspended; it was an unheard-of horror that a secular court should punish for ecclesiastical offences. When his remonstrances were of no avail, Martin marked his sense of reprobation by refusing to communicate with the prosecuting bishops, or with any who communicated with them. He was driven to break this

<sup>1</sup> Sulpicius Severus, *Hist. Sacra*, ii., 63-5.

resolve on one occasion, when he visited Maximus to implore him not to continue his persecution of the Priscillianists in Spain. Maximus refused to listen to him unless he removed his protest against what had already been done. Martin, for the sake of obtaining mercy for others, consented; but his qualms of conscience were such on his homeward journey that he sat down in mental agony till he received comfort from an angelic message that his compliance was justified.<sup>1</sup> This occurred in 385; the downfall of Maximus before the arms of Theodosius, three years later, was regarded as a just punishment for his crime, and he was always looked upon as a usurper.

I have told this story in detail, because, strange to say, the punishment of Priscillian passed also into a precedent, and was cited at an important crisis of history as teaching the proper method of dealing with Luther. Pope Adrian VI. was a German, a profound theologian, a man of learning and of high character. For these very reasons it doubtless seemed in his eyes all the more intolerable that Luther should not recognise his

<sup>1</sup> Id., *Dialogi*, iii., 15.

authority. He wrote in 1522 to the Princes of Germany and detailed his grievances. Both by temper and from regard to the office which he held he was disposed to pardon; but when an ulcer-breeding cancer would not yield to mild remedies cautery was necessary. So God swallowed up the schismatics Dathan and Abiram in the gulf: so St. Peter denounced death to Ananias and Sapphira who lied unto God: so pious emperors of old time removed with the sword of the secular power the heretics Jovinian and Priscillian.<sup>1</sup> So wrote the Pope; but the piety of Maximus was certainly unknown to his contemporaries, and the deed for which he earned that title from Adrian rendered him infamous in the eyes of St. Ambrose and St. Martin. It is not only Scripture that is perverted to men's purposes. No fact in history can be writ so clearly that men will not misrepresent it and turn it to the very opposite of its true meaning. The fact supplies the precedent, the protest is forgotten.

Indeed the protest was soon forgotten by those who lived near the time: by the middle of the next century, Leo the Great accepted as a duty the sup-

<sup>1</sup> Raynaldus, *Annales*, 1522, § 64.



pression of heresy, and raised no objection to legislation which treated heresy as a crime against civil society, and declared it punishable with death. Thus the divine law and the human law were put on the same footing, and the truth of God was no longer to be borne in upon the consciences of men by gentle pleading, but to be enforced as part of the necessary framework of social order. We are so familiar with this process and its results, that we regard them as inevitable. It was indeed inevitable that the State should wish to run the Church into its own mould. Was it equally inevitable that the Church should eagerly consent? I do not say that the Church should have stood aloof from society, or have refused to recognise the social order as proceeding from God through the agency of man's intelligence, and as capable of receiving further development from the application of Christian principles. The Church was sure to influence society by her example: but she was willing to adopt the world's arms before she had proved them. She took the gift of power and set herself to frame a strong organisation. She was no longer content to work from within, but strove to act also from

without. Thenceforth, the Church, regarded as co-extensive with society, was to be the guardian of established order.

The Church was co-extensive with society in the sense that she claimed the allegiance of the whole world for Christ; but this allegiance was to be won by the urgency of persuasion only. The Church had received no commission from her Lord as the guardian of any established order of society. That was the work of the State, not of the Church; and the State could claim a divine origin, and a divine sanction within its sphere. The Church transcended the limits of the State; it was the teacher of spiritual truth, wherein were contained the principles on which all social life rested. But Jesus repudiated interference with matters which were within the sphere of man's natural capacity to determine: "Who made Me a ruler and a divider over you?" There is a divergence of function between Church and State: one is the inspirer, the other the executor, of man's endeavours for the improvement of common life. Philosophy had striven to establish the identity between the good man and the good citizen; and an admission of certain

principles of conduct is necessary to secure a basis for the activity of the State. But it is the office of the State to protect rights and to define them ; to maintain justice as the binding link of society ; to forbid and to punish injuries, " bearing not the sword in vain." It appeals to men's sense of order, and operates on the will through the body. The Church inspires the power to fulfil duties. It enjoins love as the fruit of that knowledge which comes through faith. Its injunctions are willingly accepted because they appeal to the whole nature of man. It has no weapon save conviction. It controls the body by mastering the will, which it trains to a knowledge of its power.

When the Church allowed the State to enforce its system upon all, it abandoned its position as the divinely appointed educator of mankind. Its teaching was increasingly encumbered with temporal enactments ; its principles suffered from being subjected to forensic limitations ; the forms and methods of secular organisation disastrously affected its relations towards its members. At first excommunication, or the withdrawal of the privileges of Church membership, was a necessary protection for the purity of the Christian

body. The man whose life did not correspond to his profession, and who by open sin brought discredit on the community, was by solemn sentence put outside the fold. If he repented, made satisfaction, and by public penance gave token of the sincerity of his repentance, he might be again restored to communion. But as congregations grew in number, and were no longer connected by the bond of personal knowledge, such cases multiplied and passed under the exclusive cognisance of the priesthood. The object of penance gradually changed from being primarily the maintenance of the purity of the Christian community to being the discipline of the individual character. As the whole of society recognised the Church, the Church had to assume responsibility for all. Penance became a system, and the Church framed her law books after the model of the State. Human society found it necessary to classify offences against the common well-being and impose a penalty in each case; the ecclesiastical society followed the same example, classified sins, and imposed penance. True penitence remitted the eternal penalty of sin and merited God's forgiveness; but the satisfaction to be made to man, the

temporal punishment of sin, was still to be paid. Thus the Church developed a judicial system of her own, and became familiar with a legal procedure, which owed much to the State and reacted upon it.

Thus it was that the Church became in its organisation to a great extent the counterpart of the world. And we know that any great and organised system regards its own preservation as the first object of its care. From this point of view heresy was equivalent to treason, and must be dealt with accordingly. This was accepted as a self-evident maxim. Just as no civil society could allow the plea of fervent and aspiring patriotism to condone disobedience to the law, so the Church did not allow integrity of purpose to palliate disobedience to the ecclesiastical system.

This analogy seemed to be complete, the inference accurate. But the Church, as a spiritual society, was bidden to exert her energy by persuasion, not by compulsion. This truth was not unknown, but it was disregarded. Hence it comes that in the history of the Church we can trace two streams which by no means run in the same course. There is the rushing torrent

formed by the ecclesiastical system as it spread its power over every land, fertilising and beneficent in many ways, opening up communications, binding men together, a conspicuous highway for human progress, yet working havoc at times and spreading devastation, bearing on its bosom many impurities, and sometimes choked by the wreckage which it wrought. Besides this are the many streamlets of purely spiritual sweetness which wander at will amongst the meadows, and gladden the hearts of men; along whose banks the children play without fear, while the wavelets ripple onwards towards the ocean of God.

Does not the history of the Church bear record to the superior greatness of the achievements wrought by influence over those which were wrought by power? Who can read unmoved the story of the foundation of the Northumbrian Church or the lives of St. Francis and his companions? Does he feel the same charm in the lives of Pope Gregory VII. or Thomas of Canterbury? Who can fail to see the difference between those who strove to do God's work in God's way, and those who laboured to do God's work in man's way?

Do not let us think that this is purely a modern reflection. It was common in the mouths of whole-hearted men at all times. Few texts were more commonly quoted throughout the Middle Ages than the warning of Jesus: "The kings of the Gentiles have lordship over them, but ye shall not be so." There was a keen perception that the Church had become corrupted by the possession of power.<sup>1</sup> "Praesis ut prosis" was the cry of St. Bernard to Pope Eugenius IV., "Rule that you may serve. Act up to this; and do not you, a man, affect to dominate over men, lest all injustice dominate over you. I dread no poison, no sword, so much as I dread the lust of power. In your power you are the successor not of Peter but of Constantine."<sup>2</sup> The root of the whole matter lay there. The power claimed by the ecclesiastical authorities came to them, not from their Master, but from the world: and the gift of the world could only be used for worldly purposes. It was a fatal gift, recognised as fatal, but still regarded as necessary, a burden that could neither be borne nor be resigned. There were centuries when the Church was at peace, occupied in the splendid work

<sup>1</sup> *De Consideratione*, iii., c. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, c. 3.

of christianising and civilising the wild Teutonic races ; of mitigating the savagery of invading hordes ; of providing teaching for the young, and practising in solitary wastes the hard labours of pioneers of industry. But then, as society grew settled, and civilisation became more complicated, and men's minds grew restless and inquiring, the assumed necessities of Church and State demanded that order should be maintained at any cost. The public peace seemed to be threatened by the spread of unauthorised opinions, and the Church was exhorted to still the minds of men lest their actions should leave the accustomed grooves. And the Church had little faith in argument or persuasion. Her ministers, immersed in worldly business, were not prepared to speak words of reconciliation her theologians, accustomed to logical argument beginning from belief, not in Jesus, but in His Church, were unable or unwilling to advance to first principles. Entrenched behind the bulwarks of a vast system, they would not venture into the open plain, and were indignant that they should be called upon so to do. There were soldiers ready to sally forth and drag back the rebels captive. It was a shorter and an easier method. The ob-



ject was good, and the means were lawful. True, quite true ; but it was the building of Constantine that they were defending, and the arms with which they fought were those which were inherited from the Roman Empire, not from the teaching of the Lord or His apostles.

It is possible, it is even easy, to account for this as a necessary phase in the development of European civilisation, by imposing a useful discipline which restrained within due limits premature outbursts of speculation, which would have had disastrous effects on social order. I am not concerned to discuss this position. It is enough to say that the Church received no commission from her Master to exercise any such coercive discipline : so far as she did so, she acted as part of the world-power and must be judged accordingly. Nor is it difficult to judge the result of applying worldly methods to spiritual convictions. There are periods in the past when the temporal power acted tyrannously and unjustly in putting down the possibility of revolt, and in constructing accusations of treason. But such precautions did not crystallise into a system, nor are we ever asked to condone or palliate the

injustice which was committed. At the bar of historical judgment we are sensitive to the accusation of tyranny. A ruler who put numbers of his subjects to death on the charge of treason is held to be responsible for proving that such a step was justifiable. We require evidence of the danger, in each case, and judge according to our opinion of the urgency of the necessity. In cases of religious persecution such evidence is not forthcoming. Speculations might be unsound, but the weapons to be used against them were those of argument. The purely preventive substitution of punishment for argument was not designed really for the suppression of wrong opinion, but for the maintenance of an ecclesiastical organisation, which was allowed to develop from above, but might never be criticised from below. Moreover the great outbursts of persecution were not purely ecclesiastical, but the Church lent her sanction to secular policy. The war against the Albigensians was for the strengthening of the French monarchy; the persecution in Bohemia was to uphold the German dominion over the Czechs; the Spanish Inquisition was established to supply the Spanish monarchy with the means

of welding together a people with divers traditions. It is not too much to say that persecution for religious opinions merely cast a cloak of religion over unworthy political ends, and was powerless to check the growth of absolute irreligion when it became fashionable in high places.<sup>1</sup>

There is a pathetic interest in the struggles made from time to time by the Christian consciousness to escape from the fetters of an outward system of repression. Such an attempt was embodied in the great religious movement of the thirteenth century, which found expression in the foundation of the Mendicant Orders. The object of St. Dominic and St. Francis was the same—to overcome the evils of their time, not by the power of a system, but by the beauty of a life founded on true faith. “By their fruits ye shall know them” was the thought which prompted the activity of Dominic. “Meet example by example; set against pretended sanctity a true religion,” was the maxim which prompted his efforts to cope with materialistic heresy in Languedoc. Francis, with no consciousness of

<sup>1</sup> See Lea, *History of the Inquisition*, iii., 650.

any practical aim, yielded himself to the overpowering impulse to lead a Christ-like life, freed from all worldly ties, yet living in the world, and loving it because it was God's world, and was full of the traces of His presence. The lives and methods of both were a tacit protest against persecution. They had other answers, of a spiritual kind, to heresy and indifference; and so long as their spirit remained, their answers were powerful. But outward things were strong; and as the first fervour died away, the dominant organisation of the Church appropriated its results and used them for its own purposes. The Dominican Order was turned into the organ of the Inquisition. The Franciscans, despite the revolt of their more spiritual members, sunk into the flying squadron of the forces of the Papal monarchy. The tragedy of all great spiritual movements lies in the desire to maintain their results, not by cherishing their original spirit, but by organising them into institutions; as though men still possessed the lofty motives of their founders, when they had been choked by the mechanism devised for their preservation.

## IV.

### THE EVOLUTION OF TOLERANCE.

“I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself.” (St. John xii. 32.)

AFTER this brief survey of persecution, as it existed in the Church of the Middle Ages, we have to consider how it came to an end. My argument has hitherto been that persecution was opposed to the spirit of Christianity; I have now to show that persecution ceased because the spirit of Christianity asserted itself, and broke the bands of an artificial and imperfect system which hemmed it in.

I have already pointed out that Christendom was in possession of truth which ought to have prevented a mistake, contrary to the whole spirit of the Gospel, and condemned by the actual teaching of Christ. I have further indicated that there was a perpetual protest on the part of high-minded men against the false position into which the

Church had fallen through the claim to exercise power.

It is worth while to estimate the mental attitude of a good simple soul, and see how the limitations set by surrounding conditions checked spiritual insight. Few men deserve the title of saint better than King Louis IX. of France. His biographer gives samples of his table-talk which enable us to estimate some of his opinions. St. Louis was not ignorant of the existence of religious doubt, and sympathised with those whose faith was tried. He bade them pray and persevere, and warmly praised the advice given by a bishop to a great master of theology who confessed his doubts about the Sacrament of the Altar. "The King of France," said his spiritual adviser, "is at war with the King of England, and the castle nearest the frontier is that of Rochelle. If the King of France gave you the Castle of Rochelle to guard, and gave me a castle in the interior, which of us would be esteemed most highly at the end of the war?" "Why, I should," was the answer, "for holding Rochelle against the foe." "Master," said the bishop, "my heart is like the fort at peace, for I

have no temptation to doubt. God will give you four times what He gives me, if you keep your heart safe in the war of tribulation. Believe me, you with your doubts are more pleasing to our Lord than I am without them."

Yet while St. Louis thus recognised the trial of faith as an element of life's probation, he was in favour of making short work with unbelievers. He praised the example set by an old knight, who, visiting a monastery, and finding the monks engaged in disputation with some Jewish rabbis, summarily closed the argument by felling the chief of the Jews with his crutch. "Clerks may dispute," said Louis, "but the layman who hears the Christian faith spoken against, ought to defend it only with his sword, which he should drive home into the gainsayer."<sup>1</sup>

How are we to reconcile the different spirit displayed in these two stories? Only, I think, by reference to the current ideal of secular life which was applicable to the case of the unbeliever, and not to that of the doubter. In the case of the doubter St. Louis judged for himself, and referred

<sup>1</sup> Joinville, *Vie de S. Louis*.

to the Spirit of Christ; in the case of the unbeliever he merely transferred to religious duty the entirely inapplicable analogy of martial honour. Chivalry regarded it as the highest virtue of the knight to fight against desperate odds, but was unsparing of the foe, however unprotected he might be, if he on his part refused to surrender. Courage was but another name for force; and that was truest which men most fiercely asserted. Faith was to be maintained by discipline, and honour recoiled from unbelief. Individual responsibility was recognised, but it was limited by the need of corporate unity. Uniformity was so necessary that every discordant element must be ruthlessly removed. This was the conception of the Middle Ages; and the Church, adopting the ideal of secular society, strove to fit it to its own purposes. But the ideal was secular, and remained opposed to the spirit of the Gospel.

We learn, however, from the example which I have quoted that the theory of the rightfulness of persecution never entirely prevailed. The clergy in St. Louis's story were prepared to convert the Jews by argument: force was the resort of the intellectually feeble. The Church



as part of the framework of society might persecute ; but the Church as a body of believers must convince. The two currents flowed on side by side, and in many minds never converged. It might be argued, with some plausibility, that the Church never originated any measure of persecution, but accepted it at the suggestion of the State. I am not concerned to examine this view, because, if it were true, it would not lessen the responsibility of the Church for adopting on grounds of policy a method that was alien to her real purpose.

It was not long before this inherent contradiction in the position of the Church was subjected to criticism, and suggestions were made for the organisation of civil society on an independent basis. It is generally assumed nowadays that toleration is a purely modern virtue, and that its discovery was due to certain phases in the development of modern thought. This is scarcely an accurate account of the development of its intellectual basis. For the infliction of punishment for erroneous opinion was condemned by the Church before the fifth century, and after a brief period slumbered till the middle of the twelfth

century. As soon as persecution was organised it was criticised ; and the first criticism expressed opinions almost identical with those which now prevail. For I take it that the principles on which legal toleration is founded are chiefly two : first, that no ecclesiastical organisation can claim to exercise coercive jurisdiction over civil society ; and secondly, that the civil power is not concerned with opinions as such. Now both these opinions were clearly and incisively stated as early as 1327 by Marsiglio of Padua in his great work the *Defensor Pacis*. In this admirable treatise on jurisprudence Marsiglio investigated the source of coercive authority. He found it in the “community of citizens, determining that anything should be done or omitted regarding men’s civil acts under pain of temporal punishment.” This was the origin of all power ; the prince was the executor of the law, and consequently, the sole holder of the right to punish. Priests can have no authority save what was given by Christ ; and the question is, not what power Christ might have given them, but what He actually gave. He Himself exercised no coercive power, and so far from conferring it on the apostles, warned

them by example and precept to abstain from it. The priesthood have only the power which Christ gave them, to preach His doctrine and administer His sacraments. All else belonged to the civil power. From this it followed, that neither actions nor opinions could be punished, unless they were condemned by law. Christ's kingdom had its own rewards and punishments, which were to be assigned hereafter by Christ Himself. The duty of the priest is to teach what is necessary for the soul's health, as the doctor teaches what is necessary for the health of the body. The first expounds God's law, and applies God's remedies: "but it is vain and to none effect to compel any man unto the observing of them. For to him that should observe them only on compulsion they should be nothing available unto eternal health. And, therefore, a priest may be conveniently likened to a physician, who hath authority given him to teach or judge of those things which are profitable to be done, or to be left undone, for the obtaining of bodily health, and the avoidance of sickness or death. For the which cause also Christ in the state, and for the state of this present life, called Himself a

physician or leech, not a prince or a judge.”<sup>1</sup> Heresy, therefore, was not to be punished by penalties, unless the State for its own purposes made it punishable. Marsiglio, as a jurist, insisted both on the omnipotence and on the limitations of the civil power: “I say it is not lawful for any man to judge a heretic or misbeliever, or compel him to any pain or punishment in the state of this life. For no man though he sinneth never so greatly against any manner of discipline, speculative or practical, is punished in this world precisely in that he is such an one; but in that he sinneth against the law of man.” The laws of civil society are in his eyes purely utilitarian, and neither can, nor ought to, have any relation to man’s higher aspirations. He scorns the feeble efforts of the Church to set forth in this world the principles of God’s judgment of the world. Certainly no man could enforce more urgently the separation between the aims and methods of divine and human justice, than does Marsiglio

<sup>1</sup> I quote from the translation of William Marshall, published in 1535, p. 70. It is not surprising that Marshall found no public in England to read his translation, and complained that “though it was the best book in English against the usurped power of the Bishop of Rome, it has not sold.”

in the following passage: "In the heavenly kingdom Christ promised that He would give rewards and punishments, according to men's good works or evil works; but He never promised that He would do such things in this world, but rather doeth and worketh contrariwise to the princes and governors of this world,—for most commonly He scourgeth and punisheth just men and the workers of good deeds, or else suffereth them to be afflicted in this world, and so bringeth them to the rewards of His kingdom. But the princes of this world, do, and ought to do clean contrariwise to the order in God's kingdom, in keeping and observing justice. For they do distribute in this world rewards to the keepers of the law, and punishments to malefactors; and it is so to be done; for if they did the contrary they should trespass both against the law of man and also of God."

I need not multiply quotations to make good my point. The principles of tolerance are no modern discovery, and the secular spirit is not special to our own times. Men never thought persecution right; but they valued social order, and regarded the ecclesiastical organisation as a

necessary factor in its maintenance. I am not concerned with the sagacity of their politics. It is enough for me to point out that the question was approached from the political and not from the spiritual side. Men of piety deprecated persecution, men of intelligence demonstrated its lack of foundation ; but it was maintained for the same reason for which it had been admitted, namely, political convenience. The machinery of the Church had been adapted to the world's purposes, and the world used its additional source of power.

If we would understand the secret of the attraction which coercion of opinions possesses for the natural man, we must study it in the records of the time when men began to overstep the old barriers and indulge in greater freedom of speculation. If it be argued that excellent men who inherited a traditional conception, in which persecution had a place, were free from any personal responsibility, what are we to say of those who discarded tradition, when it was convenient for themselves, and yet denied the same right to others? It is in the rise and progress of liberalism that the causes of persecution and the limitations

of free thought are most apparent. Perhaps a few instances will make this clear.

The traditional view of the organisation of the Church received a severe shock in the fourteenth century from the schism in the Papacy; and the necessity of restoring unity led to much theological speculation. Foremost among the theologians of that time was Jean Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris, who put forth the hitherto unheard-of theory that a Pope might be deposed for the good of the Church. He is content to found one of his arguments on Aristotle's dictum that the State, *i.e.* the community, has the power to correct or depose its ruler. "This power," he proceeds, "is inalienable from a free community, which cannot by any law be suspended from its rights; how much more then has the Church such power?"<sup>1</sup> Again he asserts, "neither Pope nor any one else ought to endeavour to set up for universal obedience positive canons or traditions of men. The opposite view has caused the rupture of the Greek and Latin Churches, and daily gives occasion to strifes and scruples, by the attempt to set human law, be it canon law

<sup>1</sup> Gerson, *Op.*, ii., 916.

or civil law, on an equality with the law of God.”<sup>1</sup>

Those were principles which Gerson was willing to adopt for the purpose of ending the schism. But it happened that at the same time there lived in Bohemia a teacher who wished to apply the same principles to a revival of spiritual religion. John Hus used language very like that of Gerson when he said: “True Christians ought to resist any pretence of power which strives either by force or guile to remove them from the imitation of Christ.” “If a man knows truly that a command of the Pope stands in the way of a command or counsel of Christ, or tends to the detriment of the Church, he ought boldly to resist lest by his consent he become a party to the crime.”<sup>2</sup> But Gerson entirely declined to recognise his own principles except for his own purpose. They were valid for that and for nothing else. In the mouth of Hus they became the rankest heresy.

This may be assigned to intellectual inconsistency. But is not inconsistency the result of

Gerson, *Op.*, ii., 213.

<sup>2</sup> See my *History of the Papacy*, i., 329, for references on this point.



time-serving? Is it an intellectual and not a moral defect? It arises because men first determine from motives of expediency what they mean to do, and then call in their intellect to supply them with plausible reasons. These reasons and principles are not to be used for anything except the immediate business in hand. If an attempt is made to extend their scope, immediately fine distinctions are drawn, principles which have already been accepted are repudiated, and the barrier of orthodoxy, which has been set forward just far enough to include the actual thing which the innovator wishes to achieve, is again erected. The successful rebel becomes the sternest represser. "Indeed," he argues, "authority has already been somewhat shaken by my success ; it is my business to see that it does not totter. Because my attempt has succeeded, I am bound to see that others fail." This was exactly what Gerson did. His own action must be proved harmless by dissociating it from any other action of a like kind. He was restoring peace in Europe : all was well except for the mutiny in Bohemia ; and this must promptly be suppressed. So before the meeting of the Council of Constance,

in which Gerson's principles were to be applied to promote the reunion of Western Christendom, Gerson prepared the way for the destruction of Hus. He had his mind made up, and felt no scruples. Listen to his own words: "The most pernicious error as regards the preservation of civil order, whose pestilent root has already been cut down by the axe of many pontifical decrees, seems to me to be this: that one living in mortal sin has no power or jurisdiction over others of the Christian people." Now it may be granted that this proposition needs qualification and explanation, which might have been found in the writings, as well as in the practical teaching, of Hus and his master, Wyclif. But it was not widely different from Gerson's own view that the Christian community has an inalienable right to correct, and, if necessary, to depose, an erring ruler. Surely a little discussion might have led to an understanding. But Gerson proceeds: "It seems to my littleness, that against this error all authority, spiritual and temporal alike, ought to rise, and exterminate it rather with fire and sword than with curious reasoning. For they who with such arrogant and seditious rashness despise alike the

teaching of the apostles and of philosophy are utterly wanting, I do not say in intellect, but in public feeling.”<sup>1</sup>

I need not tell you how Gerson had his way; how a Pope was deposed according to his principles, and how Hus was burned as a warning that these principles were not really meant. The liberalism of the Council of Constance was responsible for a recrudescence of persecution, which could thenceforth claim the sanction of conciliar recognition. It was not the existence of old tradition which ushered in a new period of persecution. Men had looked behind tradition, but they thirsted for power; and when they had accomplished their own designs had no scruple in calling on authority to prevent further inquiry. It was not the growth of intelligence that was hostile to persecution. The man of intelligence knew how to secure his own freedom, but had no sympathy with the zeal which would go farther than himself.

This was the characteristic of the New Learning. Each scholar and man of letters asserted

<sup>1</sup> Palacky, *Documenta Magistri Joan. Hus. Vitam Illustrantia*, 528.

his freedom to his own opinions, but had little interest that others should enjoy the same measure of tolerance. Those who asserted liberty of thought, as a speculative right, showed little capacity for acting upon their principles. Again, I would call your attention to the fact that the advantage of free utterance of opinions and the danger of its suppression were well known in the fifteenth century, and men did not continue to prosecute because they thought it desirable in itself. Listen to the words of an eminent Englishman, Thomas More:—

“King Utopus made a decree that it should be lawful for every man to favour and follow what religion he would, and that he might do the best he could to bring others to his opinion, so that he did it peaceably, gently, quietly, and soberly, without hasty and contentious rebuking and inveighing against others. If he could not by firm and gentle speeches induce them into his opinion, yet he should use no kind of violence, and refrain from displeasing and seditious words. This law did King Utopus make not only for the maintenance of peace, which he saw through continual contention and

mortal hatred utterly extinguished; but also because he thought this decree should make for the furtherance of religion. Though there be one religion which alone is true and all others vain and superstitious, yet did he well foresee that the truth of the one power would at last issue out and come to light. But if contention and debate should be continually used—as the worst men be most obstinate and stubborn, and in their evil opinion most constant—he perceived that then the best and holiest religion could be trodden underfoot and destroyed by most vain superstitions. Therefore all this matter he left undiscussed, and gave to every man free liberty and choice to believe what he would.” Even those who held the most noxious opinions “were put to no punishment, because they be persuaded that it is in no man’s power to believe what he list. No, nor they constrain him not with threatenings to dissemble his mind and show countenance contrary to his thought. For deceit and all manner of lies they do marvellously detest and abhor.”<sup>1</sup>

So wrote More, the cultivated man of letters, in

<sup>1</sup> *Utopia*, ed. Arber, 145-6.

1516. But what was suitable for Utopia would not suit the actual England of the day. More, the religious controversialist, did not rise above the ordinary level of scurrility, and cast to the winds his maxim that it be done “peaceably, gently, quietly and soberly, without hasty and contentious rebuking and inveighing against others.” More, the Chancellor, had still less in common with his former self. Let us listen to his official style, as contrasted with his literary style:—

“Seeing the king’s gracious purpose in this point, I reckon that being his unworthy chancellor, it appertaineth to my part and duty to follow the example of his noble grace, and after my poor wit and learning, with opening to his people the malice and poison of those pernicious books, to help, as much as in me is, that his people abandoning the contagion of all such pestilent writing, may be far from all infection, and thereby from all such punishment as following thereupon doth oftentimes rather serve to make others beware that are yet clear, than to cure and heal well those that are already infected: so hard is that carbuncle, catching once a core, to be by any

means well and surely cured. Howbeit God so worketh and sometimes it is. Toward the help whereof, or if it haply be incurable, then to the clean cutting out that part for infection of the remnant, am I, by mine office, in virtue of mine oath, right especially bounden.

“Wherefore I reckon myself deeply bounden to show you the peril of these books, whereof the makers have such mischievous mind that they boast and glory when their ungracious writing bringeth any man to death. And yet make they semblance as though they were sorry for it. And then Tindal crieth out upon the prelates and upon the temporal princes, and calleth them murderers and martyr-quellers, dissimuling that the cruel wretch with his wretched books, murdereth the man himself while he giveth him the poison of his heresies, and thereby compelleth princes, by occasion of their incurable and contagious pestilence, to punish them according to justice by sore painful death, both for example and for infection of others.”<sup>1</sup>

I have selected More, as a typical instance of that pseudo-liberalism, so common at all times,

• <sup>1</sup> Preface to the *Confutation of Tindal*, written 1532.

which obscures and confuses every question which it touches. I have chosen More, because he is familiar to all, as a man of learning, of culture, of piety, and of practical capacity ; a man who had the courage to lay down his life in behalf of his opinions, when his own personal honour was at stake. I have put before you, in his own words, two contradictory utterances. If I mistake not, the very style and mode of expression will tell you which was More's real belief. "They be persuaded that it is in no man's power to believe what he list ; they constrain him not with threatenings to dissemble his mind and show countenance contrary to his thought. For deceit and all manner of lies they do marvellously detest and abhor." Thus spoke the real head and heart of the man, with the serenity that comes of a grasp of truth, and an insight into abiding principles. How different from the stilted language of the official, engaged in justifying what was convenient for the moment, deceiving himself with the belief that he was saving society by putting his principles aside, repeating well-worn platitudes about cutting out the infected parts for the preservation of the rest ; following the



example of the king's noble grace, till the king was ready to apply to him the same measure of justice as himself had applied to others.

Again, I repeat, it was neither mistaken zeal nor intellectual error that fostered persecution; it was merely expediency and the thirst for power.

Leo X. was tolerant of the philosophic doubts of Pomponazzo concerning the immortality of the soul, because such speculations were not likely to affect the position of the Papacy; but he could not allow Luther to discuss the dubious and complicated question of indulgences, because it might have disastrous effects upon the system of papal finance. Luther in return asserted the freedom of every Christian man, and frankly asked the enlightened conscience of Germany to undertake the work of ecclesiastical reconstruction. He believed that good intentions, common-sense, and an open Bible were all that was required. He would have no compulsion, "for however straitly men may command, however stoutly they rage, they cannot bring people farther than to follow them with mouth and hand; the heart they cannot compel, should they even tear at it. For true is the proverb: 'Thoughts are toll-free.'

Heresy can never be kept off by force: another grip is wanted, another quarrel and conflict than that of the sword. God's Word must contend: if that avails nothing, temporal power will never settle the matter, though it fill the world with blood. Heresy is a spiritual thing, which no iron can hew down, no fire burn, no water drown."<sup>1</sup>

So wrote Luther before human perversity crossed his path. When the German peasants took his principles literally and applied them to matters of immediate interest to themselves, Luther, who saw his prospects damaged by a popular rising, flung himself on the side of repression. It was not enough for him to detach himself and his cause from followers whom he thought misguided; he clamoured for their blood. "Let there be no pity," he cries; "it is the time of wrath, not of mercy. He who dies fighting for authority is a martyr before God. So wondrous are the times that princes can merit heaven better by bloodshed than by prayers. Therefore, dear lords, let him who can, stab, smite, destroy.

<sup>1</sup> *Werke*, ed. Walch, x., 456, 461; see other passages quoted by Beard, *Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, 171, etc.

If you fall, well is it for you : you could never die a happier death. If any man think this too harsh, let him remember that rebellion is irreparable, and that the destruction of the world may be expected at any moment."

Luther had his reward ; his movement fell into the hands of secular princes, who were authorised by theologians to decide controversies among preachers, and put down dissensions by the secular arm. Melanchthon, the mild and retiring student, wrote against heretics in language which might have been borrowed from papal bulls ; the precedents of Christian emperors suppressing the Arians were again cited, and rigid orthodoxy was again enforced. Calvin, without a shred of claim to jurisdiction, condemned Servetus to the flames, and Melanchthon wrote to congratulate him on his firmness : "The Church, both now and in all generations, owes, and will owe, you a debt of gratitude. I entirely assent to your judgment. And I say that your magistrates did right, in that, after solemn trial, they put the blasphemer to death."<sup>1</sup>

It was not the progress of intelligence, nor was

<sup>1</sup> *Corpus Reformatorum*, viii., 362.

it the proclamation of the right of private judgment, that caused the downfall of persecution. Yet the religious movement of the sixteenth century indirectly promoted that result by altering the basis on which persecution rested. Before that time Europe was regarded as a great religious commonwealth, and its rulers were bound to maintain the orthodox faith. The sixteenth century saw the growth of national States accelerated by the growth of national differences about religious observances. “*Cujus regio, ejus religio*” was a bald expression of the need universally felt for internal unity on some recognised principle however crude it might be. On whatever grounds religious persecution might be justified in Protestant States, it was practised from political expediency; and of this the State, not the Church, was the judge. Thus England under Elizabeth was exposed to dangers from foreign intervention, which could only be averted by internal union. This was hard to effect; and the desire of her rulers was to unite religious opinions on as broad a basis as was consistent with maintaining the essential characteristics of a branch of the Catholic Church. The majority of Englishmen

were satisfied; but ancient sentiment still held some, and the new theology attracted others. Neither body of dissentients wished for toleration for themselves, as a permanent solution of the question. Each wished to impose upon England universally their own system. The State regarded such conduct as dangerous, and punished it as unpatriotic. Those who suffered, suffered under the laws of the State. The Church made no claim to compel all Englishmen to enter her fold.

It was this which rendered the question of tolerance possible for discussion. In Roman Catholic countries persecution hardened into a necessary principle, which no man might question. In Protestant countries it was a matter of national policy. Changes in foreign relationships, and growth of national feelings, gradually wrought out a basis for common life, which was steadfast and secure independently of religious opinions. The literature of the seventeenth, and even of the eighteenth century, adds little to the cogency of arguments which had long been known. It all came to this principle, which was stated by an English writer in 1644: "The compel-

ling of a man to anything against his own conscience, especially in matters of faith, is a doing evil.”<sup>1</sup> Men had always known that truth, but it was not always convenient to act up to their knowledge. At the time those words were written, many men, perhaps the majority, recognised their truth. But there was the practical question, Who was to begin? If you were to tolerate your neighbour and allow him to win a majority of one, would he tolerate you? Cromwell would “meddle with no man’s conscience,” but he would not allow him “to exercise the mass,” or to use the Anglican Liturgy. Tolerance was not the doctrine of any sect or party. It was not the product of superior enlightenment, still less of growing indifference to religious questions. It was the result of social development; and it rests solely on the basis of empiricism. Practically we are tolerant because no harm comes of our being so.

This may seem an impotent conclusion; but

<sup>1</sup> From a rare pamphlet, *Liberty of Conscience*, of which Mr. S. R. Gardiner gives an account in the *English Historical Review*, i., 144. Mr. Firth (id., ix., 715) has identified the author as a merchant, by name Henry Robinson. For the growth of opinion about the toleration in England see Masson, *Life of Milton*, iii., 98, etc.

I think it is not really so. It is a testimony to the solidarity of our common life, as resting on principles which lie deeper than anything which can be enforced by human law or appraised by human judgment. Tongues may refuse to utter formulæ; language may be unable to find expression for sentiments; men, when they have to speak, may babble incoherently, or may take pride in airing petty differences; but national life goes on, quietly and strongly, because it has been penetrated by the principles which live in the Gospel of Christ. There may be talk of change: we may think such talk wise or foolish; but we feel tolerably sure that changes in laws and institutions can only register the sense of the community; and in that sense we are prepared to trust. We too have the power of speech, the opportunity for persuasion. We know that our fellow-men are willing to listen, and we believe that they are at the bottom just.

It is worth while to pause and realise what this conclusion involves.

First, it carries with it a solemn and necessary warning. If tolerance came into being as a matter of political expediency, let us see that

we establish it upon a secure basis, and accept it as a principle. It was not won by enlightenment, and it cannot be maintained merely by a trust in enlightenment. Christianity was converted into the basis for social order, and men were bidden to accept it for the maintenance of that order. Opinions which are judged necessary for social organisation tend to be exacting in their demands for entire allegiance. They advance at first by persuasion; then their upholders chafe at the slowness of progress. Why not quicken advance by compulsion? Why not reduce obstinacy by force? The temptation is always present; the spirit of persecution is ever ready to reassert itself unless it be checked by some controlling sense of duty.

Secondly, we find in the process which I have endeavoured to trace an overpowering testimony to the imperishable spirit of Christianity. For the change which I have described would have been impossible unless, behind the political motives of statesmen, there had been a conviction that persecution was not only inexpedient, but wrong. The growth of this conviction is a sign of the triumph of the spirit of Christianity; it is a



proof of the operative energy of the truth to which the Church testified, though she failed at times to express it fully.

“The development of society” is not merely a secular phrase. It is rather the testimony of the world to the work of the Incarnation. Silently, quietly, in spite of men’s misdoings and perversions, that work has been accomplishing itself. It has created a mental attitude; it has engendered hopes and aspirations; it has turned life into an opportunity; it has raised and is still raising the standard of human possibilities. And it has done this for all who have come within the sphere of its influence, whether they accept it as a doctrine or no, whether they live up to their belief in it or no. Still the truth itself urges them on, and wraps them in an atmosphere from which they cannot escape despite their wilfulness. The world, society, civilisation, call it what you will, is part of the Divine order, and is affected by the results of His revelation. And the progress of society, the growth of the manifold ties which the increasing complexity of human relationships is ever establishing, this too is God’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. When the Church erred,

by leaving her original purpose in obedience to the world's behest, it is not wonderful that the world was the first to perceive the error. No loyalty to a system should prevent us from admitting its serious mistakes. The Church throughout the ages, in spite of faults and of corruptions, was true to its mission as upholding the testimony to the presence amongst men of the Incarnate Lord. That presence wrought in divers ways upon the hearts and consciences of men. It created a new sense of human relationship; it engendered new feelings of duty; it revealed the hideousness of selfishness; it proclaimed the beauty of self-sacrifice. The world absorbed somewhat of its meaning, and its efforts grew nobler from what it learned. The Church, which has seen many of its projects undertaken by the world, can afford to bow its head before merited correction. It has been taught the meaning of its Master's promise: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself." It is for the Church to lift up her Lord: the attractive power comes from Him, and human compulsion is abhorrent to His Spirit. Alas, that for so long a time human frailty and human sin should have obscured the high

mission of the Church of Christ, and led her to set the coarse methods of the world by the side of the commission of her Master. What wonder that she should be condemned to bear her burden of the world's scorn? Oh, how the world is remorseless to its instruments as soon as they have served its purpose. The world seems so lofty, so powerful, so magnanimous that it is hard to resist its demands for help, hard to refuse to sacrifice principles for the purpose of some beneficent activity. But it is useless for the individual to turn to the world for pity when oppressed by the sense of wrong done from a mistaken desire for its service: "I have sinned in that I have shed innocent blood." How terrible the cry, how pitiful! Yet the answer rings out in the sneer, which is unassailable alike for its justice and its harshness, "What is that to us? See thou to that."

## V.

### THE NATURE OF TOLERANCE.

“Let your forbearance be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.” (Phil. iv. 5.)

As I began with investigating the causes in man of the spirit of persecution, so I would end by an attempt to estimate the meaning of tolerance, round which, as ~~found~~ persecution, misleading notions have tended to gather.

I pointed out that persecution was a natural impulse to man,—the desire to have his own way at any cost, and to have it thoroughly, by removing those who differed from him. Its danger lay in the plausibility by which it clothed power with a right to maintain itself, and furnished it with arguments which made natural vengeance seem to be a lofty duty. Now tolerance came into being as a denial of this right to exercise coercion as against opinions only. As was natural in a protest, it has rested on different principles

at different times. At one time its ground was political, and its pleadings were directed against the mere endorsement by the State of the judgment of the Church. At another time its ground was moral, and it urged that coercion could not produce conviction, but only engendered hypocrisy. Later still, its plea was intellectual, and it argued that, in a subject where there was so much diversity of opinion, no one ought to feel so certain that he was right as not to wish to learn from discussion, rather than to punish for variation from the established standard. Finally, tolerance won its way on the practical ground that men were sufficiently agreed on the fundamental questions of right and wrong for the State to have a working basis sufficient for its purposes, without setting opinions in the forefront.

Now all these pleas may be true, but the acceptance of all of them does not constitute a virtue. They only prove that persecution is not worth while; they leave toleration as merely "one of the most valuable empirical maxims of modern politics."<sup>1</sup> But tolerance, by which I mean the habit of mind which toleration has

<sup>1</sup> A. J. Balfour, *Essays*, 275.

engendered, is rightly reckoned as a virtue, and deserves careful consideration as such.

Let me adopt, for the sake of clearness, the Aristotelian method of defining virtues, and say that the subject matter with which tolerance is concerned is man's attitude towards the opinions of his fellowmen. Then tolerance is the mean state in which virtue consists; persecution is the excess, and indifference is the defect. But it is clear that in this case the defect is more easily confounded with the virtue than is the excess; and indifference, which is wrong in itself, may wear the garb of excellence. The attitude of the persecutor is clear, he wishes to impose his own opinions on every one; the attitude of the indifferent man is also clear, he has no opinions and therefore is heedless. The virtue of the tolerant man lies in having opinions, but not wishing to impose them by any external pressure or enforce them by any means save argument.

But it is obvious that the consideration of our attitude towards the opinions of others must have some influence on our attitude towards our own opinions. It may be said, indeed it has been said, that men who are certain of their opinions must

naturally wish to impose them on all, and that tolerance is only possible when opinions are regarded as open questions. This, however, gives a false meaning to tolerance, and abolishes it entirely as a virtue; for tolerance is concerned with the mode of holding our own opinions and applying them to others. A man of vague and uncertain opinions cannot lay claim to tolerance; he is exercising no self-restraint, he is not guiding himself towards any moral purpose; he is simply indifferent and incapable. The tolerant man, on the other hand, has decided opinions, but recognises the process by which he reached them, and keeps before himself the truth that they can only be profitably spread by repeating in the case of others a similar process to that through which he passed himself. He always keeps in view the hope of spreading his own opinions, but he endeavours to do so by producing conviction. He is virtuous, not because he puts his own opinions out of sight, nor because he thinks that other opinions are as good as his own, but because his opinions are so real to him that he would not have any one else hold them with less reality.

It must be admitted that the current conception of tolerance frequently uses language which goes beyond this view, and tends to favour indifference as being the most useful attitude. True, it is not called indifference, but broad-mindedness or liberal-mindedness. When, however, we attempt to analyse this conception, we find the two things confused which I have attempted to separate, — the contents of a man's own opinions, and his attitude towards the opinions of others. Now broad-mindedness is properly speaking concerned with the last of these. Society has a right to demand that every one should respect the opinions of others, as he wishes his own to be respected ; but part of this process is that every one should be allowed to express his positive opinions, which should be submitted to intellectual criticism, and not be stifled by social pressure. It is not desirable that we should utter in public only safe platitudes, and reserve our real opinions for private propagandism. Yet it must be admitted that the tendency of the present day is to enrol every man as a member of some party, political, ecclesiastical, or social, and to hold him up to reprobation if he wanders for a moment beyond



the shibboleths of the party to which he is supposed to belong. Tolerance must mean a respect for freedom of opinion. It must not set up a standard of its own, and establish an orthodoxy of latitudinarianism which may not be spoken against.

Only when this is admitted is it possible to place on a right footing the principle upon which tolerance must rest. Correlative with freedom is responsibility; and in nothing is the sense of responsibility more necessary than in the expression of opinions. In all things the freedom of the individual has to be limited by reference to the effect which its exercise will have upon others. Speech is as important as action, indeed it reaches farther in its effects, because it is more continuous. Of course the responsibility attaches in the first place to the formation of opinions; but of this process outside authority cannot take cognisance. It can only deal with opinions when they find utterance. Concerning opinions there must always be some judgment pronounced by authority, and some limitations must be set. This is true not only of opinions about ecclesiastical matters, but about

civil matters as well. Civil society cannot grant the absolute right of every man to propagate any opinions he pleases : it is bound to consider the possible consequences to social order. Though in England the State is loath to interfere, because it thinks the sense of community can be trusted to deal with extravagance, yet it reserves the right of interference. So, too, every religious organisation must have a basis for its own existence, which its professing members must not overthrow. Such a basis must be determined by authority with a full sense of responsibility, and must be from time to time revised. Limitations are not to be lightly imposed, nor are they to be lightly violated. We find the essential principles for man's guidance laid down in Scripture. "They called them and charged them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye : for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard."<sup>1</sup>

The Church is a witness to the Truth, and her

<sup>1</sup> Acts iv. 18-20.

primary duty is to see that her witness is true. The means by which she is to accomplish that duty is to see that no teaching is given under her authority which contradicts or impairs the essential elements of that Truth committed to her charge. To those who claim an irresponsible liberty of speculation, the Church must always seem intolerant, for she must deny such a claim. Of such it has been well said: "They confuse the right of the individual to be free with the duty of the institution to be something."<sup>1</sup>

"The duty of the institution to be something" is imperative on the Christian Church, which exists as a witness to God's truth, and as a channel through which the grace of God flows into the souls of men. It is not a creation of society, existing for the purposes of general utility. The truth which it sets forth was not evolved by man, but was revealed by God. It holds up for man's perpetual guidance, a Divine Person, who is the Truth respecting God and man alike. It points as the one possibility of human progress to the realisation of that Divine presence

<sup>1</sup> Amiel, *Journal Intime*, ii., 59.

as really abiding in the world. This it must maintain, or it has no reason for existing.

The value of the human activities proceeding from these beliefs was once felt to be so great that society held it could not exist without them. It committed to the Church the work of maintaining social order on these principles. The Church was allured by the dignity of such a commission, and girded itself to regulate the world. We have seen the mistakes into which it consequently fell: but we must remember that, in spite of these mistakes, the Church was educating the world to do its own work. "The growth of the secular spirit" is a formula which is used to explain much. What does it mean? I think it means simply this—that the Church, once the director of the State, undertook much business for society, which society gradually grew capable of doing for itself. It is not too much to say that every beneficent organisation which the State now works for the good of the community was taken over from the Church. The consequence is that the Church is sometimes regarded as an agency for doing good, a useful pioneer to the State. It is often praised for

its beneficent activity, is called upon to undertake some particular task, and is valued for its readiness to contribute to the solution of some particular problem. This is quite right; but many of those who are loudest in calling upon the Church to help them, regard the Church with secret or open disquiet when it states the principles of its action, or uses them to criticise the suggestions of popular politics or fashionable philanthropy. Why is this? I answer, because no one engaged in practical affairs likes to admit that there exists any form of influence which he cannot manipulate, or any body of opinion which he cannot, if necessary, explain away. I am not concerned with discussing the wisdom or the correctness of any particular opinions relating to society which are maintained by Christian Churches on the ground of their religious necessity. That is in each case a matter for discussion on religious grounds. There need be no collision between ecclesiastical politics and secular politics. A State need not necessarily maintain a lower standard of moral rectitude than the Church. The Church welcomes the gradual transference to the State of many de-

partments of social activity which have been quietly organised by her officers, till they were brought within the sphere of practical capacity to apply universally. There is work enough to be done beyond these limits, new regions to be occupied where the State is entirely unable to penetrate. But this activity rests upon a basis of its own. The members of a religious body must have views of human rights and duties, and of human relationships, which appeal to something beyond present expediency, whereas politics are increasingly concerned with expediency only, and are sensitively jealous of the existence of principles. The spiritual consciousness, however organised, is beyond the control of current opinion; and its voice is sure to be the most powerful voice, and will ring through the ages when the questions which awakened it are forgotten. The politics of past ages, and all the activity which they generated, are often rescued from oblivion only by the protest which they called forth from some seer, who raised his voice in vain, but who spake out eternal principles which never cease to inspire mankind. The Christian Church will always have to bear the charge of being intolerant in the sense in which

Isaiah was intolerant, in the sense in which Micaiah the son of Imlah answered the appeal: "Behold the words of the prophets declare good with one mouth; let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak thou good." "And Micaiah said: As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak." Such a spirit of independent judgment will never be explained away or cultivated out of existence: its maintenance is the greatest gift which the Church of Christ can bestow on civil society.

I have spoken of tolerance in its outward aspect and have attempted to disentangle it from some qualities with which it is often compared. It does not rest upon indifference, or complacency, or abandonment of principles in deference to popular opinion; but it rests upon respect for human nature, of which our own individual nature, however enlightened, intellectually or spiritually, still forms a part. If toleration, as a principle of civil policy, is the result of the discovery that a community is bound together by moral principles which underlie and survive differences of opinion, so tolerance as an indi-

vidual virtue is the recognition of the great truth about human nature on which that discovery rests. To the pious mind it was no new discovery. The earliest message that we have on record respecting man's estate was: "God said, Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." In Christ Jesus the dignity of man was revealed in its fulness. Men were created that they might become both seers and prophets of God's truth, which each man who perceived it was to help in making known to his fellows. "The true light lighteth every man, coming into the world."<sup>1</sup> Every man is capable of becoming the home of God's Spirit. Every man is charged with a message which none but he can hear and deliver, for which he is solely responsible. Hence the first practical application which St. Peter drew from the Incarnation was not, "Love the brotherhood," but, "Honour all men." How could it be otherwise to one who had himself experienced the infinite tenderness of Jesus? What, he must ask himself, had prompted such condescension? what save God's inexplicable respect for the creature of His hand? "Honour

<sup>1</sup> St. John i. 9.



all men :” had not God honoured them in a way which passed understanding and so penetrated the soul? “Honour all men :” had not Jesus endured what was more intolerable even than the pangs of death, endured man’s ignorance, and arrogance, and triviality, and vulgarity? Had He not listened patiently to their superficial smartness, and been the object of their paltry intrigues? He bore the sins of the world, and we think sometimes that we can examine and classify the contents of His overpowering burden. “The sins of the world,” they defy the power of man’s analysis; our crude categories can only take account of acts which disturb society; we condone the wilful ignorance, the selfishness, the jealousies, the harsh judgment, the deliberate misrepresentation by which many of the noblest causes are marred. It is not the wickedness of bad men, but the failings of good men which reveal the dominion of sin. It was not only the jeers of the soldiers, or the bloodthirsty cries of the mob which rent the heart of Jesus; but the curses and the denial of Peter. So the apostle felt and knew that for him too Christ died. To him the Cross of Christ was the manifestation of

man's baseness and man's dignity alike. Strengthened by the knowledge which he gained from gazing on it, he could steadily face the actual facts of life, and say: "So is the will of God that by well-doing ye should put to shame the ignorance of foolish men. Honour all men."

This then is the basis of tolerance; and its further contents are expressed in the words of my text: "Let your forbearance be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand." τὸ ἐπιεικὲς ὑμῶν, the reflex in you of that ἐπιείκεια which was so manifested in Christ. "Forbearance" is a poor word to express its meaning. It is the quick sympathy with another, by which you unconsciously put yourself in his place and appraise not his actual words or deeds, but their origin and their intent. It is the quality by which you throw away the rude measures and standard of the world, and trust yourself to the surer guidance of that "spirit of nřan" which is in you. It is a splendidly human virtue, known and valued by those who contemplated man's excellence. Listen to Aristotle's penetrating description: "It is ἐπιείκεια to pardon human failings, and to look to the lawgiver not to the law; to

the spirit and not to the letter; to the intention not to the action; to the whole and not to the part; to the character of the actor in the long run and not in the present moment; to remember good, rather than evil, and good that one has received rather than good one has done; to bear being injured; to wish to settle a matter by words rather than by deeds.”<sup>1</sup>

The forbearance, the equitableness, the fair-mindedness of Christ,—surely this should be the spirit of the Christian life, and this is what the Christian means by tolerance. It comes from the confidence of an assured hope, from the outlook on a vast horizon. The kingdom of heaven was to begin on earth; it has its place here and now, and before its contemplation the petty activities of actual life fall into due proportion. “The Lord is at hand;” that is the great motive for forbearance. Before His judgment all things will be tried, our aims among the rest. That thought is a mighty call to effort, but is a warning that more valuable than the thing done is the spirit in which it is done, and the motive from which it springs.

<sup>1</sup> *Rhet.*, i., xiii.

It is for us to see that our motive is pure ; then, though we fail to accomplish what we aim at, in the exact form in which we set it before ourselves, still a result remains, grander it may be than any we could fancy. "In nothing be anxious ; but in everything let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus." This is the secret of true tolerance, a genuine faith in God which rises above the temptation to identify God's will with our own will—

None

Could trace God's will so plain as you, while yours  
Remained implied in it.

Success may be well ; but the peace of God is better. He who has gained it for Himself has assuredly shed it on others, and that is a greater boon than any outward organisation can bestow. Success is not worth having, unless it be fairly won ; for force may coerce, and fraud may beguile, but only persuasion and conviction can bring lasting benefits. "The ignorance of foolish men : " it is always with us. We cannot escape it ; but we are not to trample it down, and think that so we

have got rid of it. It is a nobler work to make the foolish wise, and turn their ignorance into knowledge. This is a long task, but meanwhile "it is the will of God that we put them to silence by well-doing." There is an eloquence beyond that of speech. There is the persuasive significance of a devoted life, whose silence is indeed golden. It knows not misrepresentation, and uses no unsound arguments, and avoids clap-trap, and sows its seed for eternity.

Tolerance is not merely a negative virtue. It is needful on the part of the Church, as an organised body; for only by its liberal exercise can the sincerity of its individual members be preserved. No educator can discharge his task unless he encourages frankness, outspokenness, and sincerity amongst those whom he undertakes to teach. The Church, as the divinely appointed educator of mankind, must cherish these qualities. Tolerance is needful to the individual; for it is the expression of that reverence for others, which forms a great part of the lesson which Christ came to teach him. It is the means whereby he learns to curb self-conceit, and submit to the penetrating discipline imposed by Christian love.

I have traversed a large field. Let me point out one conclusion which I would leave with you. The fatal policy of persecution in the past has brought its own punishment, and the present divisions of Christendom owe their origin to that cause. Man's claim to freedom of thought has been asserted unmistakably, even wilfully. The Church has been taught afresh truths which she really knew, but which she overlooked concerning her organisation and its uses. Shall we not frankly accept the lesson, and put away any root of bitterness which remains? The day is past when any organisation can claim to do God's work by the exercise of power; and the attempt so to do has left its heritage of disaster. Ecclesiastical power will never be revived; but any lingering desire after it prevents the growth of ecclesiastical influence. God has taught us that He works by influence, not by power. He taught it by His own dealings with man; He declared it in the Incarnation. But men would not entirely learn God's lesson, and chose their own way instead of His. He has written His condemnation of their error on the record of history. He has put His Church to shame at the bar

of human judgment. In the place of that uniformity which she strove to enforce on Christendom He has afflicted her with discord and schism. Why? Because unity is undesirable or impossible? Not so. It was the subject of our Lord's last prayer for His Church: its restoration is an aim which can never be absent from the mind of any one who calls himself by Christ's name. Why, then, I ask again? Because in times past that uniformity was enforced by carnal means, when the Church grasped the weapons of the world. The hope of the future lies in the entire abandonment of those weapons. The Church will affect society as it shows its capacity to persuade, rebuke, exhort in its Master's name, not as it claims to command. The reunion of Christendom will be possible, when Christians have abandoned those prejudices which are the legacy of the days of persecution, and recognise that unity of the spirit which alone can make controversy profitable.

Meanwhile I do not know that the tolerance which is now praised by the world is very firmly established. It rests at present mainly on an equilibrium of forces which might easily be upset.

There is always a temptation to the possessors of power—be they an individual, an institution, or a class—to use it selfishly or harshly. Liberty is a tender plant and needs jealous watching. It is always unsafe in the world, and is only secure under the guardianship of the Church; for the Church possesses the knowledge of man's eternal destiny—which alone can justify his claim to freedom.

1<sup>st</sup> / 2<sup>nd</sup> / 1911



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